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Vasyl Lomachenko proudly displays who he is and where he came from.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

COVER PHOTO BY MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

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Tyson Fury (center) puts his support behind fellow Brit Billy Joe Saunders.

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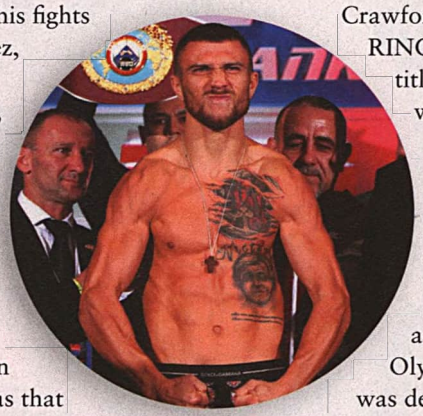
THERE CAN BE ONLY ONE

It's seldom easy selecting Fighter of the Year, and doing so for 2017 was more difficult than usual because there wasn't a clear frontrunner among the top candidates.

Vasyl Lomachenko, Terence Crawford, Mikey Garcia, Srisaket Sor Rungvisai and Anthony Joshua all excelled at the highest level of the sport last year. But with the exception of Sor Rungvisai, all defeated opposition they were favored to beat.

Sor Rungvisai, this year's winner for the Most Inspirational award, was an underdog in both of his fights with Roman Gonzalez, candidates for Upset of the Year. However, his first victory over "Chocolatito" was as controversial as it was thrilling in a candidate for Fight of the Year.



Sor Rungvisai destroyed Gonzalez in their rematch. But was that chilling fourth-round knockout evidence that the hard-hitting Thai hero is an elite fighter, or an indication of the very hard road Gonzalez had to travel in earning pound-for-pound king status? Many have observed that Gonzalez's high-volume, pressure-fighting style and eight-year championship run (spanning four weight classes) had begun to take a toll on his body even before he stepped up to the 115-pound division.

Sor Rungvisai has a chance to prove that he's a world-beater against Juan Francisco Estrada on February 24.

Lomachenko had the world-beater look in all three of his fights in 2017. In fact, the term "world-beater" doesn't quite cut it for the two-division beltholder. "Soul-taker" is more apt. Lomachenko didn't just outclass his opposition; he imposed his style and will upon them to the extent that they (or their corners) no longer had the confidence to share the ring with him.

However, Lomachenko's Fighter of the Year selection upset a small segment of hardcore fandom that complained via social media. Most of these disgruntled fans believe Crawford, who worked over Felix Diaz and then unified all four major 140-pound titles with an impressive three-round blowout of dual-beltholder Julius Indongo, was overlooked (or underappreciated) by THE RING.

They need to get a grip.

Crawford, who held THE RING junior welterweight title before moving to welterweight, is No. 2 in our pound-for-pound rankings for a reason. We know damn well how special he is.

However, as difficult as Diaz is, the 2008 Olympic gold medalist was deservedly unrated at junior welterweight, and while the unbeaten Indongo was highly ranked, let's not pretend that Crawford unified titles against Aaron Pryor or Kostya Tszyu.

The same can be said about Jason Sosa and Miguel Marriaga, whom Lomachenko bewildered into submission in his first two bouts of 2017. But not about his third foe. Guillermo Rigondeaux was considered an elite boxer.

And Lomachenko toyed with him.

I read and heard what his detractors said after the fight: "Rigo's old! He came up from junior featherweight!" Know what everyone was saying prior their Dec. 9 showdown? "This fight is historic! These are the two most skilled boxers on the planet! Loma won't have an easy time with Rigo!"

Well, he did. Give him credit. Or don't.

THE RING did, and I don't think we're going to regret the decision.

Naoko Fujioka (right) is no Joker (though in this case her opponent ended up looking a bit like the comic book character). In December, at the age of 42, Fujioka became the first Japanese fighter to win titles in five divisions with a unanimous decision over Yokasta Valle in Tokyo.

NAOKI FUKUDA

COME OUT WRITING

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

After watching Billy Joe Saunders dish out a master class against David Lemieux on December 16, to hear Lemieux's ungracious criticism of Saunders afterwards was quite frankly a joke. The Englishman boxed Lemieux's ears off throughout, used effective lateral movement and left the Canadian disheartened and frustrated. Perhaps even worse, though, was the fact that one judge awarded Lemieux two rounds and another chose to gave him three. While this didn't affect the fight result, given the recent controversies over scoring in big fights I am baffled as to how anyone watching could not have had it anything other than a shutout. A great performance anyway, with big fights now ahead for Saunders in 2018 against GGG, Alvarez or Jacobs.

Matt Connor
Lancashire, England

PUNCHERS BEWARE

Yves Ulysse Jr. was superb in defeating Cletus Seldin on December 16. And, as a big David Lemieux fan, I have to say Lemieux got totally schooled and outclassed by Billy Joe Saunders, who did not put a foot wrong. The Ulysse performance did make me wonder if it was foreshadowing what was coming for another big puncher in Lemieux. It kind of paved the way. It just goes to show, yet again, that a boxer generally beats a big puncher. Beware, Golovkin. Saunders will cause you problems. Beware, Wilder and Joshua; Tyson Fury is coming! And well done, Gary "Spike" O'Sullivan. He really did a great job in stopping Antoine Douglas. 2018 is going to bring us some amazing matchups.

Ray Fox
Keighley, England

RIGHT CHOICE

I am very glad to see Miguel Cotto retire with his health. He has been a great fighter and has always been a warrior who gives his all. We all get old. The officials in charge of boxing should take steps to protect fighters from themselves – boxers like James Toney, Roy Jones Jr. and even Muhammad Ali who have fought far beyond the time they should have retired. They all show distinct signs of brain damage, made evident by their speech. A commission should be formed to medically evaluate and force fighters to retire when they show obvious signs of such damage. Whether it is money, pride or fame that keeps them fighting, they need to be protected for their own good. This is becoming a major issue in professional football as well.

Mike White
Albany, Ky.

CHIN UP

James DeGale (who was beaten by Caleb Truax in an Upset of the Year contender) hasn't been a dominant fighter since the second round of the Andre Dirrell fight in 2015. "Gun-shy," "shot," "over-trained and under-watered" are just some of the phrases to describe his current state. Personally I think DeGale got comfortable after he won his world title and started to believe his own hype. He has not fought with the same passion and spite since his demolition of Brandon Gonzales in 2014. I think he needs to change trainers, as his current style is not working at the elite level. I also think a permanent switch back to Eddie Hearn and Matchroom would be good for him. The atmosphere that Matchroom shows whip up can carry fighters across the line in close wars of attrition. I also think choosing a hungry pressure-fighter as DeGale's first fight back after major surgery was a bad move. I know hindsight is 20/20, but didn't Frank Warren also sign off on feeding to Amir Khan an unknown Colombian tomato can by the name of Breidis Prescott? We all know how that ended. Over the last 3-4 years, a handful of British fighters – like Kell Brook, Anthony Crolla and DeGale – were part of a big boom over here in the U.K. and picked up well-deserved world titles. Now a lot of them have lost their titles and shipped a fair amount of punishment against good opposition ... no shame in that. However, it is now when good fighters become great fighters. Let's see which fighters can pick themselves up, rebuild and become kings again.

Callum
Kent, England

I LIKE WHAT YOU'VE DONE WITH THE PLACE ...

I have to give you guys props with the new look and feel of the magazine. It finally feels fresh and modern. Loved Doug Fischer's (Ringside) editorial; its in-your-face approach is what we need in this modern age. Also, the digital version includes all the things I want to make it easy to navigate and better than to just go to a website and browse. The quality of the exclusive articles is top of the line. I think they made the right choice in making Fischer the editor of the most respected boxing magazine in the business. Looking forward to more issues.

Juan Valverde
San Diego

... NOT SO MUCH

I'm a boxing historian and former fighter. I have traded THE RING books from 1936-1938 with author/collector/boxing historian Clay Moyle. I have studied, watched, and enjoyed boxing of all levels for over 53 years. I have subscribed to THE RING or KO magazines for at least 32 years. I have never been as disappointed in an issue as I was with the March 2018 edition of THE RING. You can and will do better! I thought it was ridiculous to devote an entire issue to fantasy (pound-for-pound) matchups.

Michael Tyler
Bremerton, Wa.

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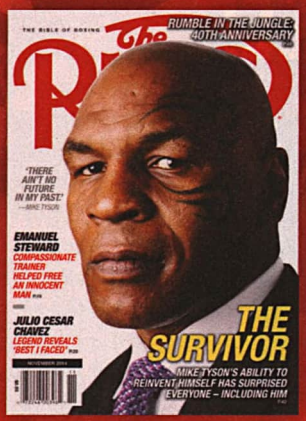

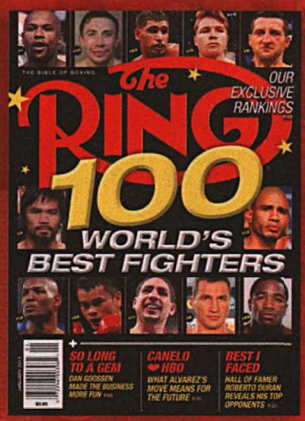

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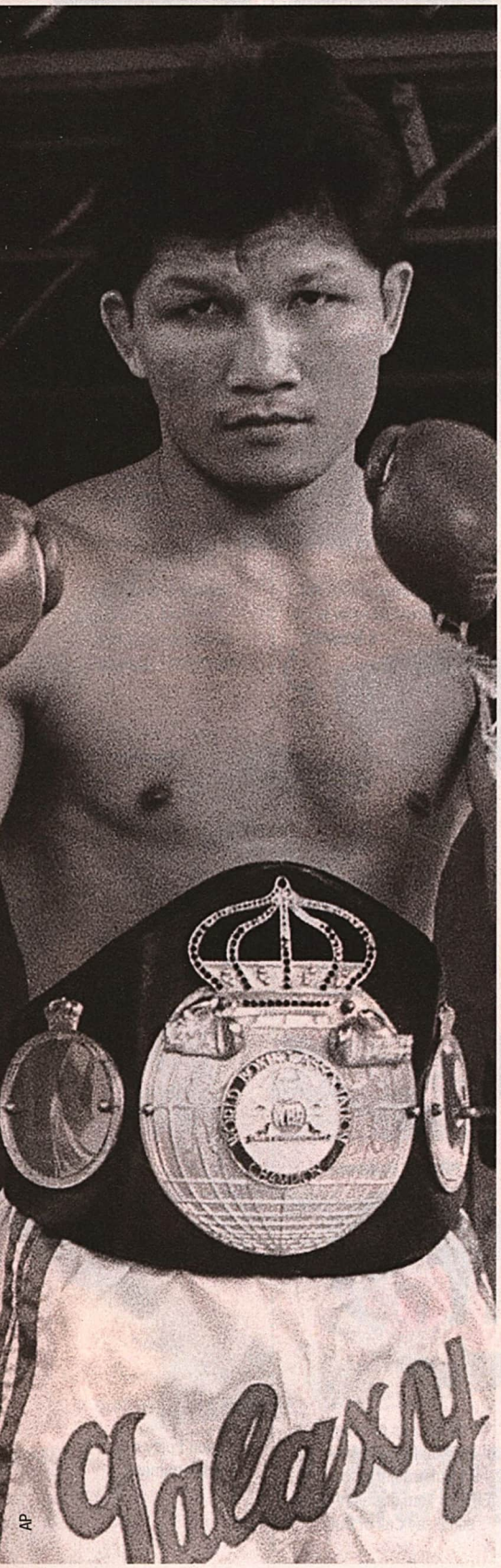
ADVANCED DEGREES



AP

Degrees of separation between fighters of the past and their more contemporary counterparts. This month, regular contributor Gregg Morgan links WBC junior bantamweight titleholder Srisaket Sor Rungvisai (winner of our 2017 Most Inspirational award and nominee in four other categories, including Fighter of the Year) with countryman and junior bantamweight great Khaosai Galaxy in 6 steps:

KHAOSAI GALAXY

fought

ARMANDO CASTRO,

who fought

SERGIO MILLAN,

who fought

FERNANDO MONTIEL,

who fought

PAULINO VILLALOBOS,

who fought

CARLOS CUADRAS,

who fought

SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI

10 A Monthly Boxing List

This month: Winning THE RING Magazine Fighter of the Year award is a coveted and rare honor for boxers. Only 17 in the 89-year history of the award have won it more than once, and less than half of that number – a group comprising some of the greatest legends of the sport – have been recognized more than twice.

Here are the 10 best boxers to have won more than one RING Fighter of the Year award. The boxers are ranked (by Editor-in-Chief Doug Fischer) by their accomplishments during the years they earned the honor (noted under each name).

Muhammad Ali
Six times – 1963, 1966 (retroactively awarded in 2016), 1972 (co-awarded with Carlos Monzon), 1974, 1975 and 1978

Barney Ross
Three times – 1933 (retroactively awarded in 2018), 1934 and 1935

Ray Robinson
Twice – 1942 and 1951

Joe Louis
Four times – 1936, 1938, 1939 and 1941

Joe Frazier
Three times – 1967, 1970 and 1971

Ray Leonard
Twice – 1979 and 1981 (co-awarded with Salvador Sanchez)

Manny Pacquiao
Three times – 2006, 2008 and 2009

Tommy Loughran
Twice – 1929 and 1931

James Toney
Twice – 1991 and 2003

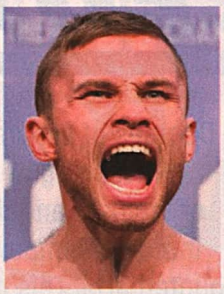
Evander Holyfield
Three times – 1987, 1996 and 1997

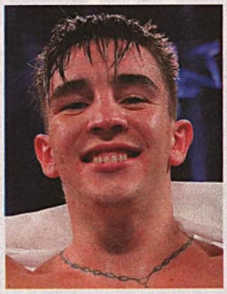
Note: Marvin Hagler (1983, 1985 with Donald Curry), Ezzard Charles (1949, 1950), Rocky Marciano (1952, 1954, 1955), Dick Tiger (1962, 1965), Floyd Mayweather Jr. (1998, 2007) and George Foreman (1973, 1976) were darn close to making the list.

FIGHTERS' FAVORITES

WHAT BOXERS ARE INTO OUTSIDE THE SPORT

— Anson Wainwright





FIGHTER »	CARL FRAMPTON FORMER FEATHERWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER	MICHAEL CONLAN FEATHERWEIGHT PROSPECT	KATIE TAYLOR LIGHTWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER
MUSIC »	"I like all types of music; there's nothing I won't listen to. I like good singers with good voices."	"I don't have one favorite genre. I love everything."	"A bit of everything, but **Coldplay** is probably my favorite."
CAR »	"I have a Range Rover Sport. I'm not really a petrolhead. I'm happy enough in my Range Rover."	"I drive a Range Rover. My dream car would have to be a **Bugatti**."	"Nissan X-Trail. The car I had is free, so any free car is a dream car." (Laughs.)
FOOD »	"British and Irish food. It's hard to beat fish and chips, with mushy peas and some tartar sauce."	"Pizza."	**"Chocolate."**
TATTOOS »	"I have a few. I don't really like them, to be honest. I have a tiger on my left arm, a New Zealand Maori tribal on my right arm, for some reason. I have my name on my back, my daughter's name on my hand, a rose on my knee. I have, 'Veni, Vidi, Vici' ('I came, I saw, I conquered') on my chest."	"I have two: rosary beads around my neck and the **Olympic rings** around my side."	"None."
ATHLETE OUTSIDE BOXING »	"Stuart Dallas, a Northern Irish footballer. He's a good friend of mine."	**"Roger Federer."**	**"Allyson Felix."**
MOVIE »	**"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest."**	"Goodfellas."	"Taken."
VIDEO GAME »	"I don't play them."	"It's a toss-up between Call of Duty and FIFA. I would say FIFA but I'm not as good at FIFA as I am at Call of Duty, so I'll say Call of Duty."	"I don't play any video games."

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Ken Buchanan became the center of attention in Scotland and beyond.

KEN BUCHANAN

61-8 (27 KOs)

Ken Buchanan is widely considered the greatest boxer Scotland has ever produced and one of the very best from Britain.

Buchanan was born and raised in Edinburgh, where his family lived a modest life in government housing. As a youngster, he was never far from trouble. A chance trip to the cinema proved to be a pivotal moment in his life, however.

"My dad took me to see Joe Louis in a film and I said to him when we came out of the cinema, 'Dad, I want to be a boxer,'" Buchanan told THE RING. "So he took me to the Sparta Boxing Club and at 8 years old, that was my introduction to boxing.

"I won my first title after being in the gym two months. I weighed in at 3 stone, 2 pounds (44 pounds) and I had two fights in the one night. That was my first outing."

Buchanan went on to enjoy a good amateur career, winning Scottish and British titles and later a bronze medal at the European championships. He estimates he had in excess of 100 amateur bouts.

Buchanan was a qualified carpenter, earning him the moniker "The Fighting Carpenter," but chose to turn pro in 1965. He based himself in Wales with manager Eddie Thomas and stablemate Howard Winstone.

Over the next five years, he learned his trade and quietly went about his business, winning the British title in 1968. The first blemish on his record came in early 1970, when he lost a close decision to Miguel Velazquez on the road in Spain.

Buchanan was able to put that disappointment behind him just nine months later, when he traveled to Puerto Rico and took on pre-fight favorite Ismael Laguna for the WBA lightweight title.

"It was outdoors, 125 degrees of heat at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in a baseball stadium, the sun beating down, and I got a suntan for nothing," he quipped.

"When I came back after the eighth round, my dad had an umbrella he had borrowed off a lady ringside. You see me sitting in the corner with an umbrella over me, and it took the sun off me."

Buchanan boxed out of his skin to claim the belt. "Beating Ismael Laguna in Puerto Rico, that was the hardest fight I've ever had in my life," he said.

In December of that year, he was invited to join a bill at Madison Square Garden. The main event featured Muhammad Ali.

"I went to America and when I got there after the weigh-in, I was in my dressing room and Angelo Dundee came in and said, 'Kenny, do you mind if Muhammad shares the dressing room?' I said, 'What's wrong with his own one?' He says, 'He's never been allocated one.' I said, 'Well let him in.' So he came in. I saw some chalk on the table, so I took a piece of it and started at one end of the room and drew a line right down the middle of the room and when I got to the bottom, everyone was standing looking at me, dead quiet. Angelo says, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'Well this is my dressing room and I'm letting him use it.' So he said, 'What's the line for?' I said, 'Well, if he steps over that line, he'll get that (waves his fist).' Muhammad just laughed. I had my back to him and

MARK LENNIHAM

my hands were getting wrapped, and he was jumping over the line and back again. And my dad said, 'He's jumping over the line,' and I turned around and he said, 'I'm doing nothing.'"

Buchanan became undisputed champion when he outpointed Ruben Navarro to claim the vacant WBC title and the Scotsman also scored a repeat win over Laguna. Then he was matched with a young Roberto Duran in June 1972. Duran was ahead on the scorecards when he hit Buchanan with a low blow on the referee's blind side. Despite Buchanan rising, the fight was waved off and Duran was awarded a 13th-round stoppage.

"What bothered me was everything down there was swollen two, three times its normal size, and it caused the break-up of my marriage," he deadpanned. "My wife loved it. And when the swelling went down, she left me."

The proud Scot rebounded to beat former lightweight champ and fellow future Hall of Famer Carlos Ortiz, as well as countryman Jim Watt. He also won the European title in 1974 and earned a shot at his old WBC 135-pound title in 1975. However, he was unable to beat Guts Ishimatsu, dropping a 15-round unanimous decision in Japan.

He walked away for a few years before returning, finally retiring in 1982 with a record of 61-8 (27 knockouts).

In 2000, Buchanan was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Buchanan, now 72, lives in the Leith area of Edinburgh, where there is a campaign underway, led by "The Ken Buchanan MBE Foundation," to commemorate his achievements with a statue in the city's center. He is divorced and has three children and two grandchildren.

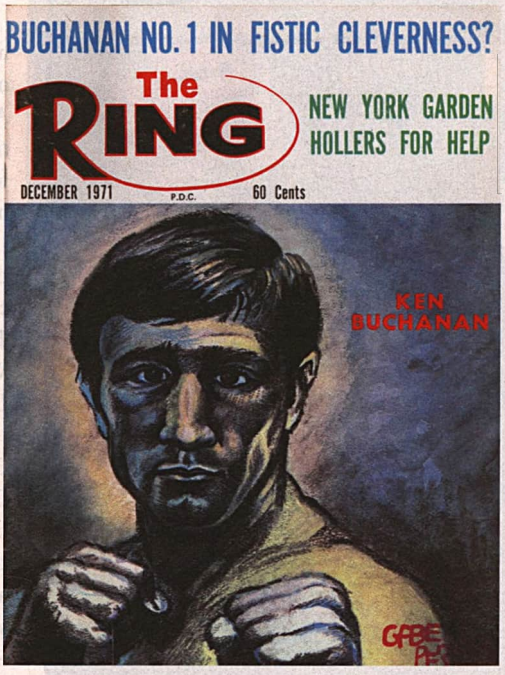
He graciously took time to speak to THE RING about the best he fought in 10 key categories.

BEST JAB

Ismael Laguna: He had a good jab, a lovely jab. He was a lovely boxer. It was very fast. It was difficult getting out of the way of it.

BEST DEFENSE

Roberto Duran: He kept his hands up and when he threw them, it hurt you. He had a good style; he kept his hands up and his head down.



FASTEST HANDS

Carlos Ortiz: Duran and Laguna, just the fact that they were hitting me, I wasn't expecting them to land. There was nothing between them. There was another guy, he was a junior welterweight and lightweight champion, out of New York, Carlos Ortiz. He had very fast hands. I hit harder than he hit me and he didn't come out for the sixth round.

BEST FOOTWORK

Ruben Navarro: Mine! A lot of opponents didn't do a lot of moving around, apart from Duran and Laguna. Jim (Watt) had alright footwork; he was fairly light on his feet but he liked to punch, which meant he had to plant his feet. Ruben Navarro in Los Angeles, he liked to move around the ring and bob and weave. He had good foot movement.

BEST CHIN

Carlos Hernandez: The guy who was good chin-wise was a guy called Carlos Hernandez. He was a junior welterweight champion. He had a good chin. He kept it down. I couldn't get a good crack at it, so I worked on his body and his hands dropped and his chin dropped – and that's when I caught him.

SMARTEST

Ortiz: He'd been in the game a long time, he knew all the moves. The reason I beat him was because he didn't have the energy to hurt me.

STRONGEST

Duran: It would have to be Duran. He was a strong lad. You could feel he was different from everybody. You'd have your arms around each other, holding on, and Roberto was always wanting to throw you off and have a punch at you.

BEST PUNCHER

Duran: I still think of him every time I go for a piss.

BOXING SKILLS

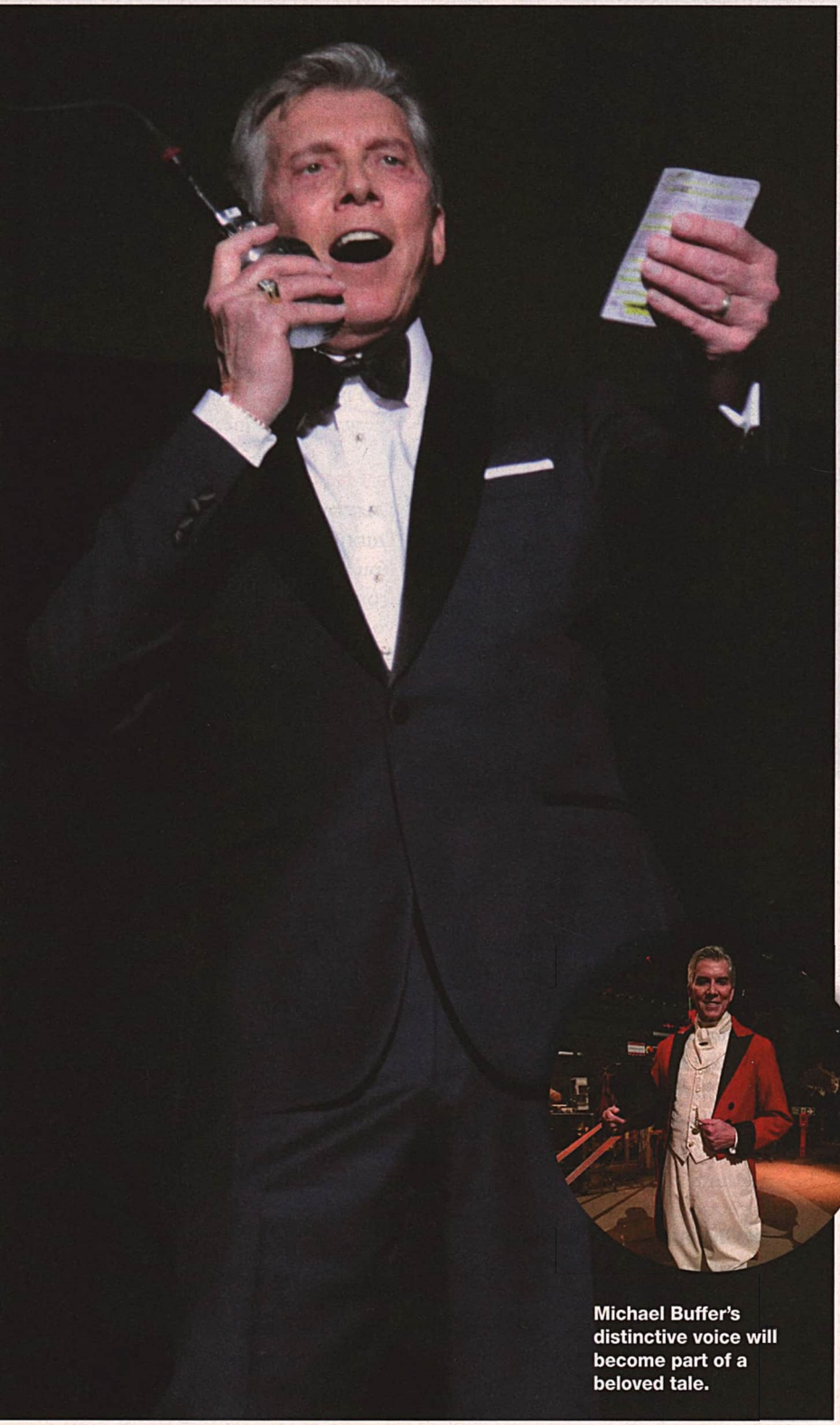
Laguna: Definitely Laguna. His sparring partner was Duran when I fought him the second time. Duran left camp and came back to New York because Laguna boxed his head off.

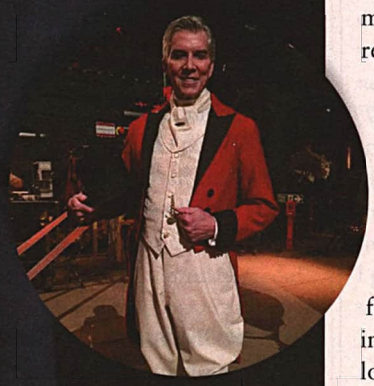
BEST OVERALL

Laguna: He had all the moves. He could jab, he could uppercut, double jab, bob and weave. He was really, really special when I fought him. It was a very hard fight.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright

'LET'S GET READY FOR DUMBO!'





Michael Buffer's distinctive voice will become part of a beloved tale.

Michael Buffer has lost count of how many feature films he has been in. His best guess is around 20. That includes three appearances in Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* franchise.

Most of the time, Buffer plays himself. On occasion, he steps out of character, as was the case in Adam Sandler's *Don't Mess with the Zohan* when Michael was featured as the villainous corporate magnate Grant Walbridge.

Now Buffer has what, for him, is the role of a lifetime. He has been cast as The Ringmaster in director Tim Burton's remake of the 1941 Walt Disney animated classic, *Dumbo*.

The remake stars Colin Farrell, Eva Green, Michael Keaton, Danny DeVito and Alan Arkin. Buffer was on set in London for four days this past September. To take full advantage of his bona fides, the script was fashioned so that Dumbo is introduced to the circus audience to the cry of "Let's get ready for Dumbo!!!"

Principle photography is now complete. The time-consuming addition of elaborate visual effects means that the film won't be released until early 2019.

"I've had some great moments in TV and movies," Buffer said recently as he reflected back on his thespian career. "Playing myself on *The Simpsons* was one of them. But being in *Dumbo* has enormous sentimental meaning for me. I remember seeing *Dumbo* in a theater when I was a kid and loving it. I took my own children to see it in the 1970s. I bought the VHS when that came out and then the DVD. To be part of the remake with so many brilliant creative people is special for me."

AP

★ ★ ★

Don Elbaum, like Zelig, surfaces from time to time in proximity to a wide range of players. So let's travel back in time to the early 1970s.

"I was promoting fight cards in Buffalo and living in the Statler Hotel or The Sheraton – I forget which," Elbaum said. "There was a fantastic deli called Harvey's attached to the hotel that had great corned beef sandwiches. One day, the deli owner said to me, 'Don, let me sell tickets for your fights.' I told him OK, and he did it for four or five shows. He could sell; he was good. And once he started selling tickets for me, I never had to pay for a corned beef sandwich.

"Anyway," Elbaum continues, "time goes by. I move to New York. And one day, there's a story in the newspaper that Harvey is now in Manhattan and has started a film company. I called his office and left a message congratulating him. His secretary called me back and said Harvey was thrilled to hear from me and would be in touch shortly. And that was it. I never heard from him again."

Why is that bit of Americana relevant today?

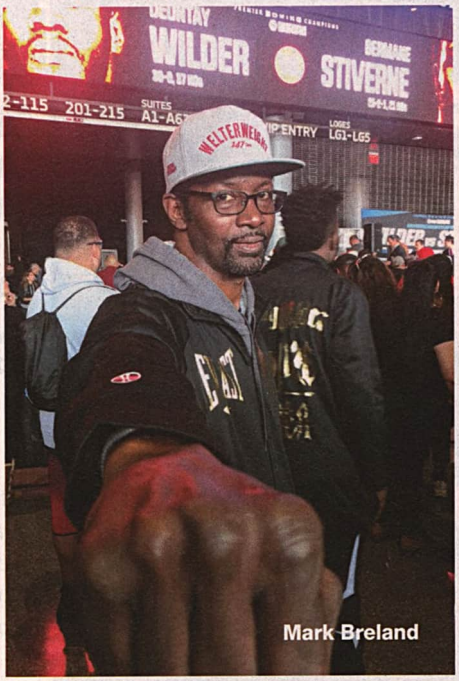
"Harvey" was Harvey Weinstein, the Academy Award-winning film producer who has recently been outed as a bullying sexual predator.

"I liked Harvey," Elbaum says in closing. "The guy I'm reading about now isn't the guy I thought I knew. But I guess I was wrong. What he did disgusts me."

★ ★ ★

A tip of the hat (pun intended) to Lamar Clark.

Clark is creative director for THE RING. But he shares that creativity with another venture. In November 2016, he launched an apparel design company called Boxing Aficionado that sells snapback caps keyed to boxing's 17 weight divisions. The caps come in multiple colors and made their ring debut when Mark Breland wore one for Deontay Wilder's October 4, 2017, title defense against Bermane Stiverne.



Mark Breland

"Sales are small right now," Clark acknowledges. But tall oaks from little acorns grow.

★ ★ ★

As Miguel Cotto's illustrious ring career comes to an end, it's appropriate to acknowledge a special friendship.

Miguel and Bryan Perez met in 2002. Bryan was recording a demo show for what he hoped would be a new boxing program. Miguel was his first interview. Over the next five years, they grew closer. They've been together on a fulltime basis since 2007 as business associates and friends.

Bryan is rarely in the spotlight. He's not one of those guys who push and shove to be on camera and walk around shouting "You da man." His official title is vice president of operations for Cotto Promotions. But he's much more than that.

Let Miguel tell the tale:

"Bryan and I see each other every day. I spend more time with Bryan than with anybody else, including my wife. Bryan wants me to be safe and happy. There have been many times when he could take advantage of a situation to do for himself. But he never does. Always, he thinks about me first and putting me in a safe place in business and every other way. Many times, he takes better care of me than he takes of himself.

"Being with Bryan makes me feel comfortable and secure. Around him, I can be me. And Bryan is my conscience. He makes me a better Miguel. When I was young, I had a lot of trouble in my marriage. Bryan spoke to me brother-to-brother and helped me to understand certain things. He taught me to do things better for me, for my wife, for my whole family.

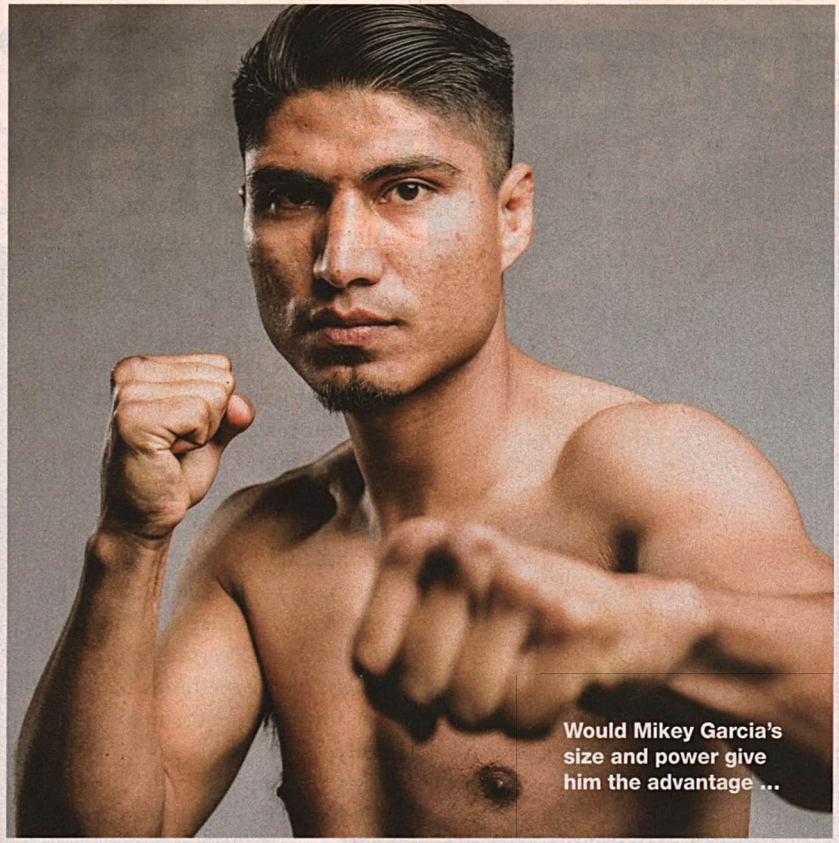
"My time in boxing is ending now, but Bryan will always be with me. If we went together into a war, Bryan would put my life ahead of his own. I really believe that. This is love, man love as a true brother and friend. And I would do for Bryan what he does for me."

★ ★ ★

Oscar De La Hoya is living a remarkable life. When he was a young boy growing up in East Los Angeles, would it even have been possible for him to fantasize about someday owning THE RING?

"No way," Oscar said recently in answer to that question. "When I was a young boy, I was busy trying to get money just to buy a copy of THE RING." RING

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – There Will Always Be Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.*



Would Mikey Garcia's size and power give him the advantage ...

MIKEY GARCIA VS. VASYL LOMACHENKO

... over the versatile boxing brilliance of Vasyl Lomachenko?

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A POTENTIAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

Mikey Garcia is the supreme classical music conductor and Vasyl Lomachenko is the ultimate jazz musician. Two vastly different styles, but both maestros within the same field.

Garcia, the reigning WBC lightweight titleholder, has mastered his craft to such a degree that his performances appear effortless. Every movement is calculated. Every punch is delivered with precision and world-class technique. The California native's split-second timing, power and composure have been the stuff of nightmares for 37 consecutive opponents.

Lomachenko is a two-weight world titleholder who would be taking on Garcia in a bid to claim a third. The Ukrainian wizard never fights the same way twice, improvising offensively and defensively whenever the moment moves him. His stunning blend of foot movement, reflexes and laser-quick fists looks all but impossible to solve.

In 2017, Garcia knocked out the previously unbeaten Dejan Zlaticanin with one punch and took four-weight titleholder Adrien Broner to school over 12 rounds. Lomachenko, THE RING Fighter of the Year for 2017, bedeviled Jason Sosa, Miguel Marriaga and Guillermo Rigondeaux to such a degree that all three men ended the night on their stools (which, since Nicholas Walters did the same at the end of 2016, made it four in a row).

So, which style would reign supreme? Three experts try to make a case for who they think would prevail in this dazzling battle of pound-for-pound entrants.

TWITTER POLL: WHO WINS? LOMACHENKO 70% ★ GARCIA 30% (1,595 VOTES)

GARCIA ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ LOMACHENKO

135 POUNDS

GARCIA		LOMACHENKO
30	AGE	30
37-0 (30 KOS)	RECORD	10-1 (8 KOS)
81 PERCENT	KO PERCENTAGE	97.4 PERCENT
ORTHODOX	STANCE	SOUTHPAW
5 FEET 6 INCHES (168 CM)	HEIGHT	5 FEET 7 INCHES (170 CM)
68 INCHES (173 CM)	REACH	65½ INCHES (166 CM)

FIGHTER:

CARL FRAMPTON

Two-weight world titleholder

I admire Lomachenko a lot and he's one of a kind. He's my favorite fighter today to watch; there's no one else in the world with a style like his and he's just unique. Lomachenko is constantly setting traps and embarrassing people. It must be so frustrating to fight someone who is that relaxed and makes it look so easy. I picked him to beat Rigondeaux in the middle rounds, but the way the fight played out was still surprising. Lomachenko literally played with Rigo. Garcia can punch with both hands and he's a great fighter. A matchup between him and Lomachenko is one I would love to see. Two totally different fighters; Garcia is the boxer-puncher and Lomachenko is this incredibly athletic fighter. With Garcia, he could spark anyone around the smaller weight divisions, and although Lomachenko might be slightly taller, Garcia is the much bigger man. He has also perfected the fundamentals of boxing but, then again, Lomachenko does things that no one else can do. My pick on this fight could change daily but, right now – and I hate to say it because I love Lomachenko – I believe Garcia beats him at lightweight.

Prediction: GARCIA

TRAINER:

DOMINIC INGLE

Trainer of Billy Joe Saunders and Kell Brook

Lomachenko is a very good mover and he's great at what he does. He's like the new Floyd Mayweather in that he nullifies everyone he fights. A lot of people can be put off by that kind of stuff but, for me, it's a work of art. Lomachenko also has a bit of fire and flash about him and he's making fighters quit because he's so hard to solve. The win over Rigondeaux was kind of expected because Rigo was a (junior featherweight) and couldn't travel up the weights. Now, in this fight, Garcia would be bigger than Lomachenko. He's the heavier man, he's smart, he's cool under pressure, he picks his shots and he can punch very hard. The way Garcia knocked out (Zlaticanin) was very impressive and that shows you just how hard he can punch. Lomachenko, as good as he is, did lose a fight (to Orlando Salido) and even though he's improved dramatically, that's something Garcia can tap in on. I'm going to go with Garcia because only in very rare circumstances does a fighter continually move up and beat bigger men. Lomachenko is terrific, but Garcia might be a bridge too far for him.

Prediction: GARCIA

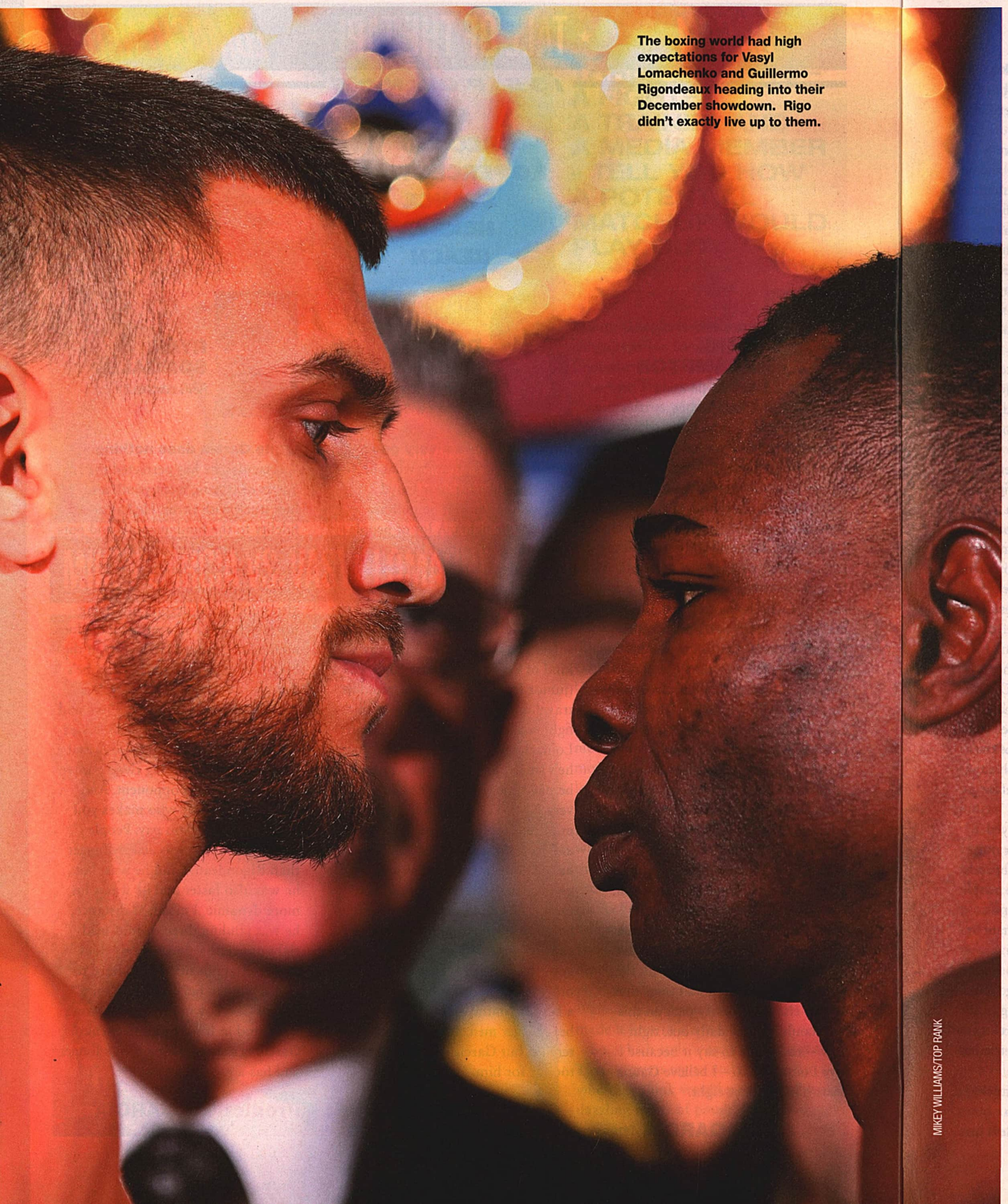
MEDIA:

RYAN SONGALIA

RING contributor

While Garcia does nothing spectacular, he has perfected the basics of boxing from youth and he's stuck with them. He has great fidelity to the fundamentals and puts it all together when the bell rings. He can brawl or he can thread the needle with accuracy. Garcia can also punch, and despite not being the fastest guy I've ever seen, he does all the little things. He invests in the body, he has a brilliant jab and he's defensively responsible. There's so much precision to Mikey's game and he's really compact. What impresses me most about Lomachenko is that he seems to be thinking two or three steps ahead of his opponent. And he's not just a guy who makes you miss; he'll make you pay. People say Lomachenko was simply bigger than Rigondeaux, and he was, but he was also faster and he was a lot more dynamic. I mean, at distance, he was landing three or four lead right uppercuts, and nobody does that to Rigondeaux. It's so hard to pick a winner, but I'm going for a Mikey Garcia win because he won't just stand in front of Lomachenko. Garcia is not only bigger; he's longer and has a great jab.

Prediction: GARCIA



The boxing world had high expectations for Vasyl Lomachenko and Guillermo Rigondeaux heading into their December showdown. Rigo didn't exactly live up to them.

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

NEVER BREAK THE CODE

GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX BETRAYED HIMSELF WHEN HE QUIT AGAINST VASYL LOMACHENKO

This is one in a series of columns from all-time great Bernard Hopkins as told to Joseph Santoliquito about ring tactics, what's currently going on in boxing and what all fighters should know in and out of the ring.

I have a full admission: I didn't see the Vasyl Lomachenko-Guillermo Rigondeaux fight live, but I did see replays and I did hear and read a lot about it. What I don't need to see, what I know, is the fighter's code. It's one of those unspoken, unwritten things that says as a fighter, you never quit. For Rigondeaux, you can tell he was looking to quit. When a fighter is constantly looking down, as Rigondeaux was in the clips of the fight that I saw, that tells me he's looking for a soft spot on the canvas to lie down.

Yes, you can say he was literally looking for a way out of that fight.

Rigondeaux did more than break that code. More importantly, he broke his own code. I'm not going to dispute the fact that Rigondeaux is a special fighter. Look at all he's done in the Olympics and as a pro. When he fought Lomachenko, there were a lot of respected boxing people that placed Rigondeaux in the top five of their pound-for-pound lists.

That came from the standards he set for himself. Boxing is an individual sport. You can have all of the best trainers in the world – diet people, physical conditioning people they have these days, the best promoter – you can have all of that. But if you don't have the commitment, discipline and desire to win, you're not going anywhere. It's a standard you set for yourself.

When I started my career, my goal and dream was to become a world champion. People forget that I lost my first fight. That didn't stop me. It didn't stop me because I set a standard for myself. You train and work to beat the guy in the other corner, yes, but you're really competing against yourself. You're the one telling yourself what you can do, how much you can take. People can try and tell you, but ultimately it's you doing the work.

Rigondeaux made himself a world champion and an Olympic gold medalist. His standard was high. Now it's shattered. He has to face himself in the mirror. That's a tough thing to do when you know the truth. And he knows the truth: He quit. He broke the code. It's like Roberto Duran, one of the all-time greats. He made one major mistake in his career, and people, whether they are boxing people or not, know the "No mas" fight. It's a stain that sticks to you and never goes away. Go through all of the great things Duran did, and after all of these years, someone will still say, "No mas."

It's the same stain Rigondeaux put on himself against Lomachenko. He had his chance to show the world what he could do. Once he started to realize he couldn't beat him, he started looking down on that canvas for a soft spot to land.

I think Lomachenko is amazing. He's excellent. Look at his skill level; it's like the fundamentals come so naturally to him. I could be walking through an airport and someone could come out of nowhere and throw a punch at me ... my body would instinctively know how to react. I wouldn't even have to think. That's Lomachenko. He has the basics and beyond that.

Lomachenko's footwork and handwork is excellent. He has an old-school mentality. Look at his angles, his mix of power and speed. Who's going to beat that guy?

When I see someone like Lomachenko, I know he could survive back in the day with any of those fighters like Duran, Sugar Ray Leonard, Tommy Hearns and Marvin Hagler. Lomachenko is no joke. He has to be respected. I would put his talent in the range of those guys. He reminds me of Michael Carbajal, a little guy who did everything right, clean, no mistakes.

Lomachenko is the fighter of the year.

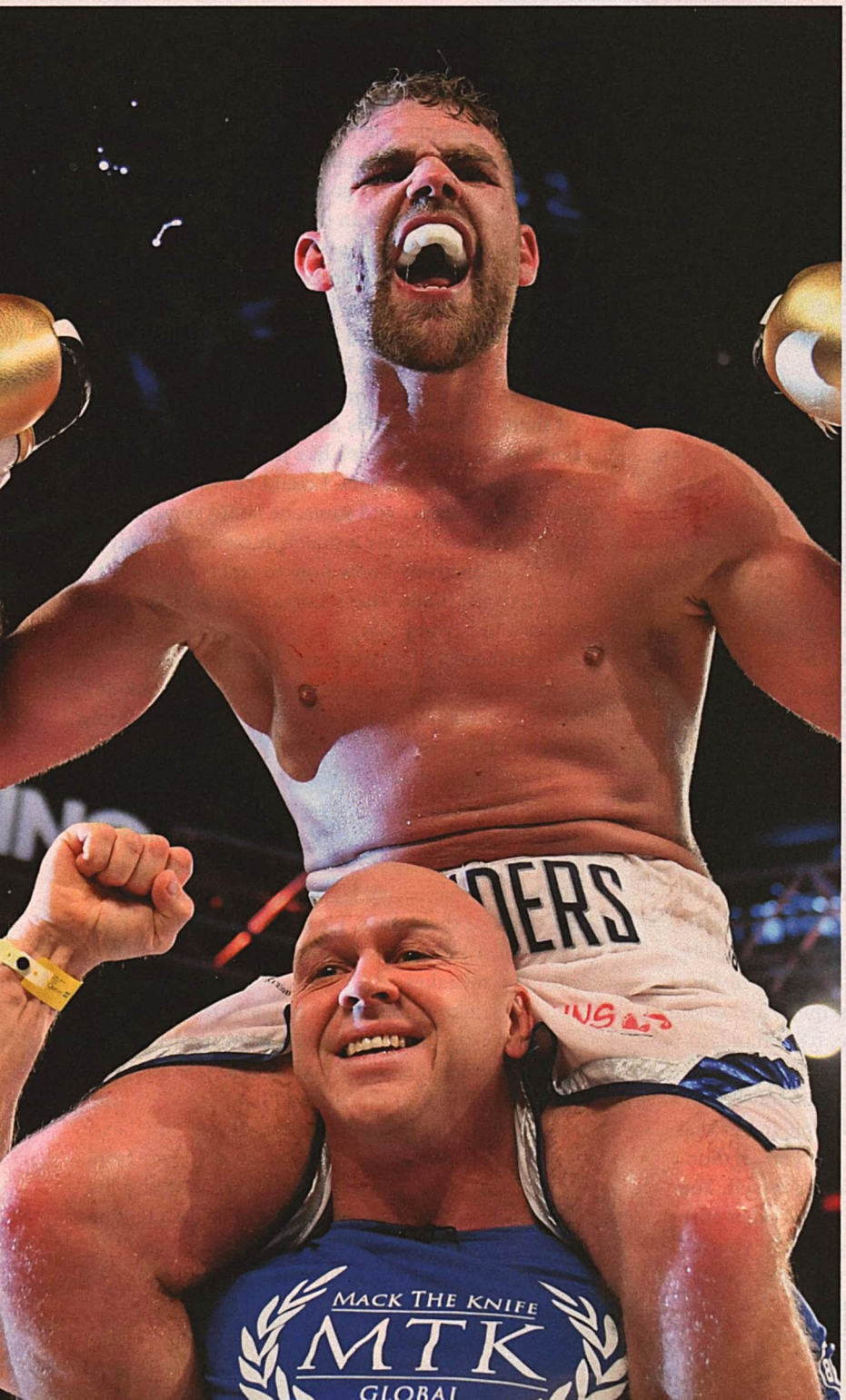
I can see and understand why Rigondeaux had so many problems against him. But you have to come up with a Plan B. If there is no Plan B, then it's up to you to find it. Rigondeaux regrettably now has this as part of his legacy. He'll never get away from it. He could do a million things right the rest of his career and he'll always be reminded of the night he quit against Lomachenko.

You don't break the fighter's code. Remember that. RING

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BILLY JOE SAUNDERS

By **Brian Harty**



Before reading this, you might want to check page 34 to recall why David Lemieux was considered to be such a threat to incumbent WBO middleweight titleholder Billy Joe Saunders on December 16.

Lemieux's award-winning knockout of Curtis Stevens was a perfect illustration of why certain fighters are always given a "puncher's chance" going into any fight, no matter the odds, and why the reluctance to dismiss such a fighter is so strong. It's because they have the power to do *that* when they connect. In fact, Stevens himself was considered to have a puncher's chance going in against Lemieux, same as he was (charitably) before facing Gennady Golovkin in 2013.

The problem is that chances tend to wither in the presence of sure things. And the puncher's chance is usually invoked to disguise a mismatch.

Then again, "sure things" are often hindsight. Against Saunders, Lemieux wasn't favored, even fighting on his home network, HBO, on his promoter's card in front of a home crowd in Canada. His limitations were known. But Lemieux was by no means the underdog, either, and that was in large part due to fresh memories of Stevens slumbering beneath the ropes in New York.

And Saunders? He was just the guy babysitting a belt for GGG or Canelo. This fight was considered, by many North Americans anyway, a duel for the honor of losing to one of the top two middleweights. Basically a competitive, interesting fight before a blowout.

The first adjective was destroyed within five minutes. Whether or not the second remained relevant depends on whether you're one of those people who considers watching a mantis enthusiastically decapitate its mate to be "interesting."

The visibly bigger Saunders controlled the distance, jabbing from his southpaw stance and staying mobile throughout the fight, circling to Lemieux's left to keep him unsettled. But it was when the challenger managed to get off a lunging attack that the gulf separating the two of them was truly revealed. Saunders just

wasn't there to be hit, easily slipping punches and then nimbly ducking to the side for another angle, often resulting in Lemieux getting nailed from behind his own shoulder after whiffing a left hook. The Englishman's main defense was simply the air between himself and Lemieux's gloves.

And since nobody but a folkloric version of Willie Pep can win a round without throwing a punch, Saunders delivered a steady dose of them – more than Lemieux in all but two rounds, according to CompuBox, and landed at twice the rate overall. Lemieux was well below average – both the division's and his own – in every category.

Outclassing gradually became humiliation. Slips were followed by taunts. While Lemieux repeatedly tried and failed to touch his target, Saunders gleefully spun a web of whupass around his disoriented prey until the final bell. After that, the only surprise was that Lemieux had somehow won some rounds on the judges' cards.

True, Saunders' style isn't for everyone – Lemieux most of all. The result produced the inevitable post-fight accusation that the Brit had run all night, never giving the hometown hero the chance to cash in his puncher's chance. With hindsight now at our disposal, however, we can see it was always going to be a mismatch. Saunders is no babysitter. He's really good at what he does, plain and simple. RING

POUND FOR POUND: In the first professional bout between two double-gold Olympians, Vasyl Lomachenko sealed his Fighter of the Year cred by completely neutralizing Guillermo Rigondeaux, who capitulated after six rounds. Loma kept his No. 3 rank while Rigo was spared complete banishment for losing to the best; he fell from No. 4 to No. 9.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: On the heels of his failed drug test being ruled the result of medication, Luis Ortiz was allowed back into the list at No. 5 after a second-round knockout of Daniel Martz. That pushed Tony Bellew out of the ratings and triggered the reshuffling of Kubrat Pulev from No. 3 to No. 6.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Sergey Kovalev (No. 2 last month) resurrected the "Krusher" and picked up a vacant belt with a two-round pounding of Vyacheslav Shabranskyy; he jumped over reclusive titleholder Adonis Stevenson to No. 1 as a result.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: James DeGale fell from No. 1 to No. 6 and lost his title to Caleb Truax, who rose from the depths of the fight odds to claim the upset (and the No. 5 spot) via majority decision. Truax's arrival kicked Tyron Zeuge off the list.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: With a class gap reminiscent of Loma-Rigo, Billy Joe Saunders defended his title with what should've been scored a 12-round shutout against David Lemieux in Canada. Saunders rose from No. 4 to No. 3 and Lemieux fell from No. 3 to No. 7 as a result. A slight shuffle also raised Jermall Charlo and Demetrius Andrade to Nos. 5 and 6, respectively.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Nothing you won't know if you've already perused this issue, but Sadam Ali scored a bit of an upset with a unanimous decision over Miguel Cotto – and the judges scored their own upset by getting it right! Ali entered the list at No. 4 while Cotto (No. 3 last month) absorbed a well-deserved ovation and then hung up his gloves.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Denis Shafikov (No. 4 last month) made the rare move down in weight, thus clearing the way for French veteran Yvan Mendy to come in at No. 10. Then Terry Flanagan (No. 2 last month) moved up and Javier Fortuna became the new No. 10.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: A card showcasing 130-pounders in Las Vegas triggered a few moves. Unrated Miguel Roman entered at No. 8 after stopping Orlando Salido, who dropped out from No. 3 after what might finally be one too many for the Mexican pit bull. Kenichi Ogawa also entered the list (at No. 6) after winning a controversial split decision over No. 7-rated Tevin Farmer. Edner Cherry (No. 10 last month) was squeezed out by all the action.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: No. 8-rated Jesus Rojas had been without a fight for 15 months and was dropped, which opened up No. 10 for undefeated Brit Josh Warrington.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Hugo Ruiz (No. 6 last month) was also over the inactivity limit, so he departed and young Ghanian Isaac Dogboe took the bottom spot.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Oscar Negrete (No. 9 last month) moved up the scale, opening up a spot at No. 10 for hard-boiled veteran Omar Narvaez.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

FLYWEIGHTS: Vincent Legrand (No. 6) fought twice in the past 14 months but both times as a featherweight, so he was deemed fair game for removal at 112. Unbeaten Ukrainian Artem Dalakian moved in at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No. 1-rated Kosei Tanaka moved up to pursue 112-pound pastures, which moved Ryoichi Taguchi and Milan Melindo into the Nos. 1 and 2 spots, respectively. Those two were scheduled to fight on New Year's Eve for the vacant RING championship. Tanaka's departure opened up a vacancy for once-beaten (by Tanaka) titleholder Angel Acosta at No. 10.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Wanheng Menayothin protected his belt and retained his No. 1 rating with a unanimous decision over Tatsuya Fukuhara (No. 9 last month). Fukuhara dropped to No. 10, which, being at 105 pounds, is the maximum distance one can be from Tyson Fury in the RING ratings.

Sergey Kovalev (right) began his post-Ward comeback with a two-round demolition of Vyacheslav Shabranskyy.

THE FIGURES UNDER THE FIGHTERS' NAMES INDICATE: WEEKS IN THE RATINGS • COUNTRY • RECORD

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C TYSON FURY
306 • U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

1. ANTHONY JOSHUA
113 • U.K. • 20-0-0 (20 KOs)

2. DEONTAY WILDER
214 • U.S. • 39-0-0 (38 KOs)

3. JOSEPH PARKER
90 • New Zealand • 24-0-0 (18 KOs)

4. ALEXANDER POVETKIN
26 • Russia • 33-1-0 (23 KOs)

5. LUIS ORTIZ
3 • Cuba • 28-0-0 (24 KOs)

6. KUBRAT PULEV
324 • Bulgaria • 25-1-0 (13 KOs)

7. ANDY RUIZ JR.
82 • Mexico • 29-1-0 (19 KOs)

8. DILLIAN WHYTE
54 • U.K. • 22-1-0 (16 KOs)

9. DOMINIC BREAZEALE
44 • U.S. • 19-1-0 (17 KOs)

10. JARRELL MILLER
21 • U.S. • 20-0-1 (18 KOS)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. OLEKSANDR USYK
117 • Ukraine • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)

2. MURAT GASSIEV
59 • Russia • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)

3. MAIRIS BRIEDIS
96 • Latvia • 23-0-0 (18 KOs)

4. DENIS LEBEDEV
413 • Russia • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)

5. YUNIER DORTICOS
16 • Cuba • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)

6. KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI
124 • Poland • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)

7. ILUNGA MAKABU
233 • Congo • 21-2-0 (20 KOs)

8. ANDREW TABITI
14 • U.S. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)

9. MAKSIM VLASOV
13 • Russia • 41-2-0 (23 KOs)

10. KEVIN LERENA
10 • S. Africa • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. SERGEY KOVALEV
258 • Russia • 31-2-1 (27 KOs)

2. ADONIS STEVENSON
238 • Canada • 29-1-0 (24 KOs)

3. ELEIDER ALVAREZ
198 • Colombia • 23-0-0 (11 KOs)

4. OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK
58 • Ukraine • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)

5. ARTUR BETERBIEV
159 • Russia • 12-0-0 (12 KOs)

6. DMITRY BIVOL
28 • Russia • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)

7. SULLIVAN BARRERA
54 • Cuba • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)

8. BADOU JACK
18 • Sweden • 22-1-2 (13 KOs)

9. MARCUS BROWNE
45 • U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

10. JOE SMITH JR.
80 • U.S. • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. GILBERTO RAMIREZ
181 • Mexico • 36-0-0 (24 KOs)

2. GEORGE GROVES
316 • U.K. • 27-3-0 (20 KOs)

3. CALLUM SMITH
134 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

4. CHRIS EUBANK JR.
24 • U.K. • 26-1-0 (20 KOs)

5. CALEB TRUAX
3 • U.S. • 29-3-2 (18 KOs)

6. JAMES DEGALE
238 • U.K. • 23-2-1 (14 KOs)

7. ANDRE DIRRELL
174 • U.S. • 26-2-0 (16 KOs)

8. ANTHONY DIRRELL
176 • U.S. • 31-1-1 (24 KOs)

9. DAVID BENAVIDEZ
32 • U.S. • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)

10. JUERGEN BRAEHMER
9 • Germany • 49-3-0 (35 KOs)

MATT HEASLEY/HOGAN PHOTOS/GOLDEN BOY

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C CANELO ALVAREZ**
  110 • Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)
- **1. GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
  316 • Kaz. • 37-0-1 (33 KOs)
- **2. DANIEL JACOBS**
  159 • U.S. • 33-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3. BILLY JOE SAUNDERS**
  161 • U.K. • 26-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **4. SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  38 • Ukraine • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **5. JERMALL CHARLO**
  22 • U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **6. DEMETRIUS ANDRADE**
  7 • U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **7. DAVID LEMIEUX**
  135 • Canada • 38-4-0 (33 KOs)
- **8. RYOTA MURATA**
  52 • Japan • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **9. ANDY LEE**
  159 • Ireland • 35-3-1 (24 KOs)
- **10. HASSAN N'DAM**
  206• Cameroon • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1. ERISLANDY LARA**
  339 • Cuba • 25-2-2 (14 KOs)
- **2. JERMELL CHARLO**
  216 • U.S. • 30-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **3. JARRETT HURD**
  59 • U.S. • 21-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4. SADAM ALI**
  4 • U.S. • 26-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **5. BRIAN CASTANO**
  26 • Argentina • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6. LIAM SMITH**
  120 • U.K. • 26-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **7. AUSTIN TROUT**
  290 • U.S. • 30-4-0 (17 KOs)
- **8. MICHEL SORO**
  54 • France • 31-2-1 (21 KOs)
- **9. MACIEJ SULECKI**
  11 • Poland • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10. JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  10 • U.S. • 24-1-1 (15 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1. KEITH THURMAN**
  251 • U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **2. ERROL SPENCE**
  117 • U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **3. SHAWN PORTER**
  212 • U.S. • 28-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **4. KELL BROOK**
  349 • U.K. • 36-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **5. DANNY GARCIA**
  126 • U.S. • 33-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **6. LAMONT PETERSON**
  45 • U.S. • 35-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **7. LUCAS MATTHYSSE**
  30 • Argentina • 38-4-0 (35 KOs)
- **8. JEFF HORN**
  26 • Australia • 18-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **9. MANNY PACQUIAO**
  60 • Phil. • 59-7-2 (38 KOs)
- **10. JESSIE VARGAS**
  95 • U.S. • 28-2-0 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C TERENCE CRAWFORD**
  141 • U.S. • 32-0-0 (23 KOs)
- **1. MIKEY GARCIA**
  22 • U.S. • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2. VIKTOR POSTOL**
  228 • Ukraine • 29-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **3. ANTONIO OROZCO**
  117 • U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **4. REGIS PROGRAIS**
  75 • U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **5. JULIUS INDONGO**
  56 • Namibia • 22-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **6. EDUARD TROYANOVSKY**
  109 • Russia • 27-1-0 (24 KOs)
- **7. SERGEY LIPINETS**
  55 • Russia • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **8. JOSH TAYLOR**
  25 • U.K. • 11-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9. RANCES BARTHELEMY**
  32 • Cuba • 26-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **10. JOSE RAMIREZ**
  7 • U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C JORGE LINARES**
  199 • Venezuela • 43-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **1. MIKEY GARCIA**
  48 • U.S. • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2. ROBERT EASTER**
  91 • U.S. • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **3. RAYMUNDO BELTRAN**
  38 • Mexico • 34-7-1 (21 KOs)
- **4. RICHARD COMMEY**
  135 • Ghana • 25-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **5. ANTHONY CROLLA**
  114 • U.K. • 32-6-3 (13 KOs)
- **6. FELIX VERDEJO**
  89 • Puerto Rico • 23-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **7. LUKE CAMPBELL**
  14 • U.K. • 17-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **8. DEJAN ZLATICANIN**
  12 • Montenegro • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **9. YVAN MENDY**
  3 • France • 40-4-1 (19 KOs)
- **10. JAVIER FORTUNA**
  2 • Dom. Rep. • 33-1-1 (23 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1. VASYL LOMACHENKO**
  81 • Ukraine • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)
- **2. MIGUEL BERCHELT**
  48 • Mexico • 32-1-0 (28 KOs)
- **3. GERVONTA DAVIS**
  50 • U.S. • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4. ALBERTO MACHADO**
  10 • P.R. • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **5. FRANCISCO VARGAS**
  181 • Mexico • 24-1-2 (17 KOs)
- **6. KENICHI OGAWA**
  3 • Japan • 23-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **7. TEVIN FARMER**
  38 • U.S. • 25-5-1 (5 KOs)
- **8. MIGUEL ROMAN**
  3 • Mexico • 58-12-0 (45 KOs)
- **9. JEZREEL CORRALES**
  87 • Panama • 22-2-0 (8 KOs)
- **10. JHONNY GONZALEZ**
  23 • Mexico • 65-10-0 (54 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1. LEO SANTA CRUZ**
  122 • U.S. • 34-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2. GARY RUSSELL JR.**
  144 • U.S. • 28-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3. CARL FRAMPTON**
  74 • U.K. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **4. LEE SELBY**
  198 • U.K. • 26-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **5. ABNER MARES**
  243 • Mexico • 31-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **6. OSCAR VALDEZ**
  90 • Mexico • 23-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **7. JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  92 • U.S. • 25-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8. SCOTT QUIGG**
  18 • U.K. • 34-1-2 (25 KOs)
- **9. JESUS ROJAS**
  15 • P.R. • 26-1-2 (19 KOs)
- **10. JOSH WARRINGTON**
  1 • U.K. • 26-0-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  373 • Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **2. JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  133 • U.S. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3. REY VARGAS**
  159 • Mexico • 31-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4. DIEGO DE LA HOYA**
  74 • Mexico • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **5. MOISES FLORES**
  77 • Mexico • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6. DANIEL ROMAN**
  15 • U.S. • 23-2-1 (9 KOs)
- **7. RYOSUKE IWASA**
  15 • Japan • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **8. JULIO CEJA**
  31 • Mexico • 32-2-0 (28 KOs)
- **9. CESAR JUAREZ**
  14 • Mexico • 20-5-0 (15 KOs)
- **10. ISAAC DOGBOE**
  1 • Ghana • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

THE RING Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

Records provided by boxrec.com

RING RATINGS

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C SHINSUKE YAMANAKA
321 • Japan • 27-1-2 (19 KOs)

1. ZOLANI TETE
94 • S. Africa • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)

2. JAMIE MCDONNELL
243 • U.K. • 29-2-1 (13 KOs)

3. RYAN BURNETT
29 • U.K. • 18-0-0 (9 KOs)

4. JUAN CARLOS PAYANO
170 • Dom. Rep. • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)

5. ZHANAT ZHAKIYANOV
46 • Kaz. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)

6. LIBORIO SOLIS
42 • Venezuela • 25-5-1 (11 KOs)

7. LEE HASKINS
133 • U.K. • 35-4-0 (14 KOs)

8. EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
36 • P.R. • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)

9. PAUL BUTLER
13 • U.K. • 25-1-0 (13 KOs)

10. OMAR NARVAEZ
4 • Argentina • 47-2-2 (25 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. NAOYA INOUE
156 • Japan • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)

2. WISAKSIL WANGEK
243 • Thailand • 44-4-1 (40 KOs)

3. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
64 • Mexico • 36-2-0 (25 KOs)

4. CARLOS CUADRAS
292 • Mexico • 36-2-1 (27 KOs)

5. KHALID YAFAI
94 • U.K. • 23-0-0 (14 KOs)

6. JERWIN ANCAJAS
70 • Phil. • 28-1-1 (19 KOs)

7. RAU'SHEE WARREN
22 • U.S. • 15-2-0 (4 KOs)

8. ROMAN GONZALEZ
68 • Nicaragua • 46-2-0 (38 KOs)

9. JONAS SULTAN
15 • Phil. • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)

10. REX TSO
12 • China • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. KAZUTO IOKA
172 • Japan • 22-1-0 (13 KOs)

2. DONNIE NIETES
66 • Phil. • 40-1-4 (22 KOs)

3. DAIGO HIGA
65 • Japan • 14-0-0 (14 KOs)

4. JUAN CARLOS REVECO
326 • Argentina • 39-3-0 (19 KOs)

5. MORUTI MTHALANE
35 • S. Africa • 35-2-0 (24 KOs)

6. ANDREW SELBY
30 • U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)

7. FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
28 • Mexico • 25-4-1 (17 KOs)

8. MASAYUKI KURODA
23 • Japan • 28-7-3 (16 KOs)

9. SHO KIMURA
22 • Japan • 15-1-2 (8 KOs)

10. ARTEM DALAKIAN
1 • Ukraine • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. RYOICHI TAGUCHI
159 • Japan • 26-2-2 (12 KOs)

2. MILAN MELINDO
163 • Phil. • 37-2-0 (13 KOs)

3. KEN SHIRO
57 • Japan • 11-0-0 (5 KOs)

4. CARLOS CANIZALES
51 • Venezuela • 19-0-1 (16 KOs)

5. PEDRO GUEVARA
248 • Mexico • 30-3-1 (17 KOs)

6. GANIGAN LOPEZ
95 • Mexico • 28-7-0 (17 KOs)

7. HEKKIE BUDLER
62 • S. Africa • 31-3-0 (10 KOs)

8. FELIX ALVARADO
10 • Nicaragua • 30-2-0 (26 KOs)

9. AKIRA YAEGASHI
104 • Japan • 25-6-0 (13 KOs)

10. ANGEL ACOSTA
3 • P.R. • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)

1. WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
341 • Thailand • 49-0-0 (17 KOs)

2. KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
169 • Thailand • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

3. BYRON ROJAS
93 • Nicaragua • 24-3-3 (10 KOs)

4. HIROTO KYOGUCHI
37 • Japan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)

5. JOSE ARGUMEDO
104 • Mexico • 20-4-1 (12 KOs)

6. CARLOS BUITRAGO
272 • Nicaragua • 30-2-1 (17 KOs)

7. RYUYA YAMANAKA
59 • Japan • 15-2-0 (4 KOs)

8. SIMPHIWE KHONCO
62 • S. Africa • 18-5-0 (7 KOs)

9. LEROY ESTRADA
31 • Panama • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)

10. TATSUYA FUKUHARA
34 • Japan • 19-6-6 (7 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND

1. GENNADY GOLOVKIN
150 • Kazakhstan • 37-0-1 (33 KOs)

2. TERENCE CRAWFORD
139 • U.S. • 32-0-0 (23 KOs)

3. VASYL LOMACHENKO
80 • Ukraine • 10-1-0 (8 KOs)

4. SERGEY KOVALEV
146 • Russia • 31-2-1 (27 KOs)

5. CANELO ALVAREZ
110 • Mexico • 49-1-2 (34 KOs)

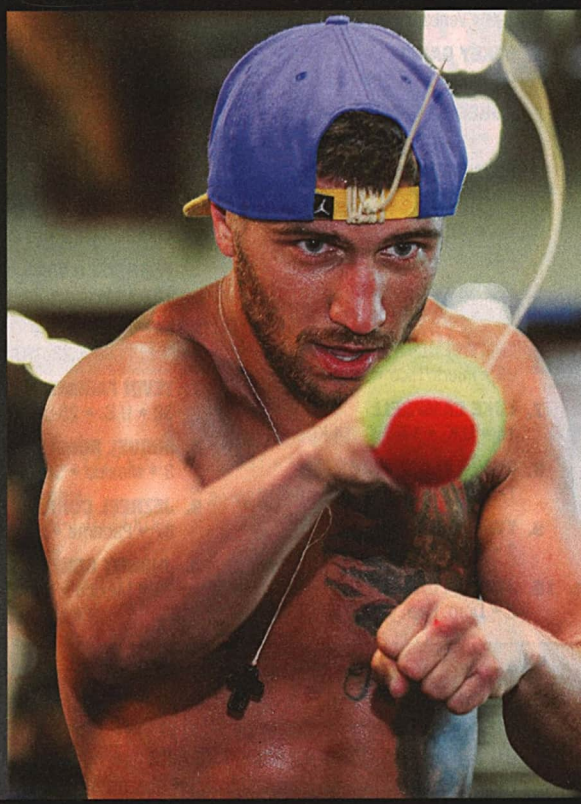
6. MIKEY GARCIA
22 • U.S. • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)

7. NAOYA INOUE
19 • Japan • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)

8. ERROL SPENCE JR.
16 • U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)

9. GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
227 • Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)

10. SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI
14 • Thailand • 44-4-1 (40 KOs)



THE RING POLICY ON RATED BOXERS WHO TEST POSITIVE FOR PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS

THE RING will remove from its ratings any rated boxer — including a champion — if such boxer at some point undergoes drug testing (Olympic-style or otherwise) and that boxer tests positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

In the event that a boxer has undergone testing in which the boxer provides two samples ("A" and "B") and the boxer's "A" and subsequent "B" samples test positive for a performance-enhancing drug or if his "A" sample tests positive and he waives his right to have the "B" sample tested, then the boxer shall immediately be removed from the ratings.

A boxer whose "A" sample tested positive and is awaiting the results of his "B" sample will not be allowed to fight for a championship or rise in the ratings.

A boxer who is removed because of a positive test will have the opportunity to earn his way back into the ratings after any suspension period is completed.

A boxer who is dropped also may be reinstated if the testing agency subsequently reverses its decision or a court of competent jurisdiction finds that the test result was invalid.

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

THE BEST OF

2017

THE 89TH ANNUAL RING AWARDS

After a frustrating 2016, boxing had something of a comeback as some major events featuring top fighters attracted mainstream attention and finally gave hardocre fans something to cheer about. »

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

BY DOUG FISCHER

VASYL LOMACHENKO

In the 89-year history of THE RING's Fighter of the Year award, no boxer has ever earned the honor with as few fights under his belt as Vasyl Lomachenko has. Then again, few have achieved as much as the Ukrainian amateur star did after only 11 pro bouts.

Lomachenko (10-1, 8 knockouts) was selected as THE RING's Prospect of the Year in 2013 after only one fight – his October 12 pro debut against Jose Ramirez. Eight months after that impressive fourth-round KO, the wizardly southpaw won his first world title, the vacant WBO featherweight belt, by taking Gary Russell Jr. to school over 12 rounds. (Lomachenko's boxing clinic against the highly touted unbeaten U.S. Olympian was performed in his third pro bout, just three months after he received his own education in gritty pro tactics via 12-round split-decision loss to grizzled veteran Orlando Salido.)

Two years and three title defenses later, he won his second world title in a second weight class, the WBO 130-pound belt, with a fifth-round KO of Roman Martinez. His first defense – an embarrassingly one-sided mastery of Nicholas Walters that forced the unbeaten former featherweight titleholder to pull a "No Mas" after seven rounds – was so impressive that Lomachenko had jumped into the top half of most pound-for-pound lists by the end of 2016.

So, what made Lomachenko's 2017 so special? Why was he selected as THE RING's Fighter of the Year over worthy candidates such as Terence Crawford, Anthony Joshua, Mikey Garcia and Srisaket Sor Rungvisai?

For starters, he fought more than the other standouts in 2017 – three times – continuing to outclass and bewilder opposition to between-rounds retirements, but he also made large strides toward transitioning from a boxing-world phenom to the kind of general sports standout recognized by casual fans and mainstream media.

Lomachenko's humiliating brand of dominance was expected against his first two opponents of 2017, Jason Sosa and Miguel Marriaga, both solid contenders that will give any other world-class featherweight or junior lightweight a grueling night. Lomachenko forced the battle-tested scrappers to remain on their stools after nine and seven rounds, respectively, and he didn't mind showboating as he gradually picked them apart from every conceivable angle.

Although Lomachenko was favored to beat his third opponent of 2017, fellow two-time Olympic gold medalist Guillermo Rigondeaux, he wasn't expected to have his way with the counterpunching master.

Rigondeaux, who carried a 17-0 pro record into the anticipated showdown at The Theater inside Madison Square Garden, was the older of the two savvy left-handers (37 to 29) and moving up from the 122-pound division, but the Cuban also brought with him a style that many believed was impossible to dominate or look good against.

Lomachenko did both en route to Rigondeaux's inglorious retirement after six rounds.

Lomachenko downplayed the victory during his post-fight interviews, basically stating that he did what he was supposed to do, but there can be no downplaying of his boxing ability or his rising stature in the sports world.

Lomachenko appears to be on his way to becoming a bona fide attraction. It was literally standing-room-only inside the 5,000-seat Theater (with no space for comps or auxiliary media). Promoter Bob Arum says the two-division titleholder will fight at least three times in 2018, perhaps once in the "big room" of Madison Square Garden. Lomachenko is clearly done with small venues and fighting in front of limited TV audiences.

Lomachenko-Rigondeaux was watched by 1.73 million on ESPN, Top Rank's new broadcast partner. It was the network's highest-rated show on December 9, exceeding viewers for the Heisman Trophy presentation and the MLS Cup.

Lomachenko's future fights will be televised on ESPN, which contributed to his crossover appeal in 2017 and will undoubtedly enhance his popularity in the U.S. in coming years.

For now, he's the toast of the boxing world, where hardcore fans use his name as an adjective or verb when expounding on their favorite sport via social media. A talented prospect like Josh Kelly might be described as having "Lomachenko-esque" moves. A fighter who is bewildered into submission might be said to have been "Lomachenko'd."

Lomachenko's reputation has been established enough in 2017 that boxing geeks now argue how he would fare in a mythical matchup with a prime Floyd Mayweather Jr. at 130 pounds.

However, Lomachenko isn't interested in the future Hall of Famer, but rather one of the standouts of Mayweather Promotions, former IBF 130-pound beltholder Gervonta Davis. His "call out" to Davis, which was directed at Mayweather's official Twitter account, attracted a lot of attention and eventually pulled Mikey Garcia into the social media conversation.

Lomachenko eventually Tweeted a poll of four potential opponents – Miguel Berchelt, Garcia, Davis and Jorge Linares – which has garnered more than 40,000 votes. Garcia and Davis received the most votes. But if Lomachenko can get any two of the four in the ring in 2018, he'll likely be a strong candidate for back-to-back Fighter of the Year honors. ★

RUNNERS UP:

- Anthony Joshua
- Srisaket Sor Rungvisai
- Terence Crawford
- Andre Ward

BY TOM GRAY

ESTHER LIN/SHOWTIME

When Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier came together in Manila for their third and final encounter, the prevailing wisdom was that it would be a better event than a fight. Frazier was considered shot and "The Greatest" would merely have to show up to secure an easy win over his bitter nemesis.

As we all know, the reality was a little different. Ali prevailed via 14th-round stoppage, but he went through hell on earth to retain the heavyweight championship of the world and secure one of his greatest triumphs.

When Anthony Joshua vs. Wladimir Klitschko was made, it was Klitschko who many believed to be shot. The Ukrainian icon was coming off a 17-month layoff and hadn't won a fight for more than two years. An 11-year win streak, nine of those as a heavyweight titleholder, was snapped when Klitschko suffered an ignominious decision defeat to Tyson Fury in November 2015.

While Joshua vs. Klitschko was no Manila, that's simply down to the fact that neither fighter was realistically capable of filling the Ali and Frazier roles. But this fight delivered. On April 29, 2017, Joshua and Klitschko put on a sensational display of skill and fighting guts, reigniting the excitement in heavyweight championship boxing.

And in many ways, the narrative followed the same line as Ali-Frazier III. It was a global event that captured the imagination of the mainstream. The bout was aired on pay-per-view in the U.K., and both Showtime and HBO purchased U.S. broadcasting rights (Showtime aired live and HBO on delay). Just like the golden era of heavyweight boxing, this title fight had made the world stop.

It was all the effect of the magic wand Joshua and Matchroom promoter Eddie Hearn had waved to transform the fighter's Olympic super heavyweight gold medal at London 2012 into a professional gold mine. Good-looking and amiable, the marketable Joshua was headlining pay-per-view events in the U.K. before he won the IBF title from American Charles Martin in April 2016.

The other good news for Hearn was that Joshua could whack – as in seriously whack. Heading into the Klitschko bout, the 6-foot-6 colossus from Watford, England, had knocked out all 19 of his opponents and not one of them had heard a bell for Round 8. Those stats – combined with Klitschko's age, inactivity and a serious dip in form – saw Joshua installed as a 2-1 favorite.

On fight night, a U.K. post-war attendance record of 90,000 fans created enough electricity to light up the capital. The noise was deafening.

The first four rounds were solid and relatively even, but it was the fifth that sent this showdown into the stratosphere. Joshua exploded out of the blocks and nailed Klitschko with a series of powerful combinations that forced the veteran challenger to seek refuge on the canvas. Klitschko was hurt, cut and on the verge of being taken.

But not without a fight.

Seconds after rising, the challenger caught Joshua with a heavy left hook that had an immediate effect. In his 21st year as a professional, with 68 fights under his belt, the cerebral Ukrainian knew that Joshua was woozy. Klitschko continued to ram home the power shots, and the defending titleholder looked positively exhausted as the round came to an end.

The sixth was worse for Joshua. Klitschko, after establishing range with the left hand, crossed over a sizzling right that landed flush on the jaw. A follow-up left helped seal the knockdown, and the Englishman needed every second of a mandatory eight-count to recover his senses. Using defensive instincts that belied his professional experience, Joshua somehow managed to survive the session.

Both men had their moments over the next few rounds, and perhaps Klitschko was guilty of returning to his stereotypical safety-first approach. But you're never safe against a puncher of Joshua's caliber. After ducking under a left hook, Klitschko was caught flush by a ferocious right uppercut in the 11th. Dazed and shaken, the ex-champion went down under a torrent of firepower and did very well to get up.

Joshua had let his man off the hook once before and learned from it. Considering the pace of the fight and the damage he himself had sustained, the IBF beltholder's follow-up was terrific. Joshua battered Klitschko with a strong two-fisted attack to score another knockdown and went through the gears when Klitschko again dragged himself to his feet. Finally, referee David Fields called a halt to the action at 2:25 of the penultimate round.

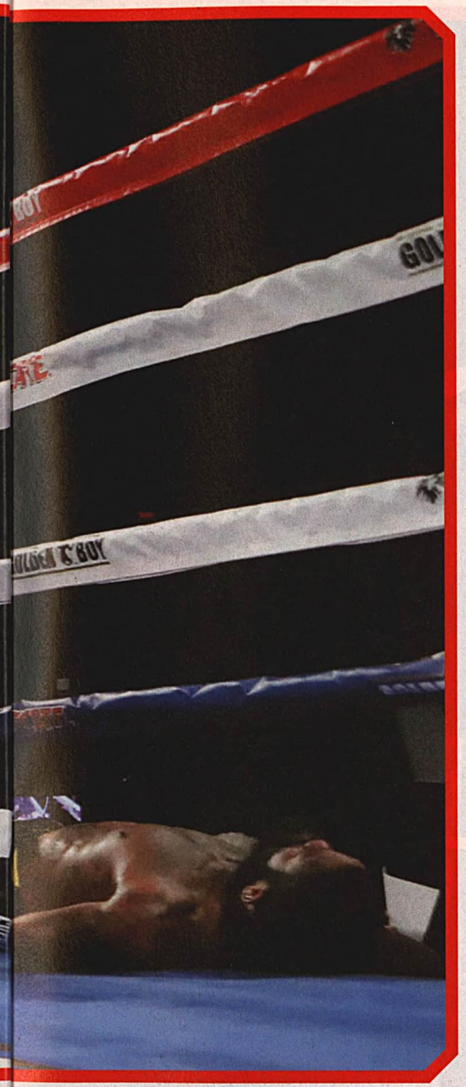
The victory saw Joshua retain his IBF heavyweight title and claim the vacant WBA version.

Unlike Ali and Frazier, there was no hostility between Joshua and Klitschko, who were good friends before and remained so after they fought. But just as with 1975's "Thrilla in Manila," this bout is THE RING Magazine's Fight of the Year and nobody who saw it will ever forget it. ★

RUNNERS UP:

- Canelo Alvarez D 12 Gennady Golovkin
- Srisaket Sor Rungvisai UD 12 Roman Gonzalez
- Miguel Berchelt KO 11 Francisco Vargas
- Miguel Roman TKO 9 Orlando Salido

BY BRIAN HARTY



DAVID LEMIEUX KO 3 CURTIS STEVENS

2

2017 gave us a lot to think about in this category.

We got the Dempsey-esque image of a fighter draped in photographer's row after getting knocked through the ropes (Sam Eggington KO 10 Ceferino Rodriguez). We saw the fruits of veteran tenacity (Luis Collazo KO 6 Sammy Vasquez) and the dangers of high mass multiplied by high velocity (Yunier Dorticos KO 2 Dmitry Kudryashov and Daniel Dubois KO 1 AJ Carter). Immanuwel Aleem was dropped flat on his back like a carbonite-encased Han Solo after a single left hook from Hugo Centeno. Jermell Charlo alone produced two highlights (KO 6 Charles Hatley and KO 1 Erickson Lubin). Ray Beltran saved his whole freakin' family with one punch on HBO! (Or at least maybe saved himself from being deported.)

And those were some of the knockouts that *didn't* make our top five.

This can get awkward. With so many choices, scrutiny tends to fall more on the quality of the person being knocked out than the person doing the knocking, and deciding which knockout is more worthy than another can start to sound like deciding who deserves to remain conscious. It's easy to forget that all fighters risk experiencing the chicken dances, faceplants, invisible opponents and other indignities of a disrupted nervous system – and much worse – every time they go to work.

KOs are harsh, though. A Knockout of the Year should stand out, and part of that is being less predictable than backyard watermelon-punching on YouTube (as spectacular as that is, especially in super slo-mo).

Our four runners-up included a fighter who thoughtfully brought a pillow for his victim (Joshua Greer KO 6 James Smith), the latest step in a multidivision conquest (Mikey Garcia KO 3 Dejan Zlaticanin), a finishing combo ripped straight from a video game (David Benavidez TKO 8 Rogelia Medina) and a fight that was over in less time than it took to read this sentence (Zolani Tete KO 1 Siboniso Gonya, all of 11 seconds into the round).

And then there was the winner …

David Lemieux and Curtis Stevens had an important bond going into their HBO-televised battle on March 11 in Verona, New York: They'd both lasted eight rounds against Gennady Golovkin. Stevens was six fights and 3½ years removed from his experience – time enough to accept post-GGG life – but Lemieux had only put two fights between himself and the setback. He was still rebuilding and looking to reassure his fans and promoter that he was the sledgehammer-armed man they knew, loved and paid for.

Stevens was also on a rehab mission. The former "Chin Checker" (a nickname given to him and buddy Jaidon Codrington when both were heavy-handed New York prospects) had notched two wins after a long layoff that followed a decision loss to Hassan N'Dam. For him, the Lemieux fight would most likely be his last shot at rising above gatekeeper status.

Two dangerous punchers meeting at the crossroads in an HBO main event. All it needed was the right finish.

Lemieux was the main aggressor, chopping at Stevens' body and head with loaded-up hooks. Stevens wasn't as active but he had moments, using his faster hands to target Lemieux's temples and find gaps underneath his elbows. It was turning into a good fight.

Midway into Round 3, Lemieux clearly had seen something – or at least had decided to try something. His pace dropped to predatory and his focus seemed to shift from doing general damage to finding a very specific moment (back in the video game analogy, this is where the power bar is building up to a full charge). Stevens cautiously went into reverse.

Lemieux made his move when Stevens' back was about a foot from the ropes. First was a decoy half-jab, followed by a straight right that stunned Stevens and allowed Lemieux to get in close. Then, as Stevens opened up to throw a left hook (an opening helped by Lemieux cleverly using his already-extended right hand to bat Stevens' left arm away, thus forcing him to throw a wider, weaker punch), Lemieux launched his own left hook.

Stevens' punch actually landed first, but did no harm. Not that it mattered. He was unconscious the instant Lemieux's hammer hit him and remained so on the canvas for a couple worrying minutes before being carried out on a stretcher. It was a scary knockout.

It was also exactly what Lemieux needed for his career, but the boost would be short-lived. Two fights later he would suffer his own loss – of a very different kind, but just as decisive – at the hands of Billy Joe Saunders. As one-sided as that fight was, though, it's worth remembering that the odds beforehand were even – and worth assuming they were that way because the oddsmakers saw what happened to Curtis Stevens. It's the sort of knockout that stands out.★

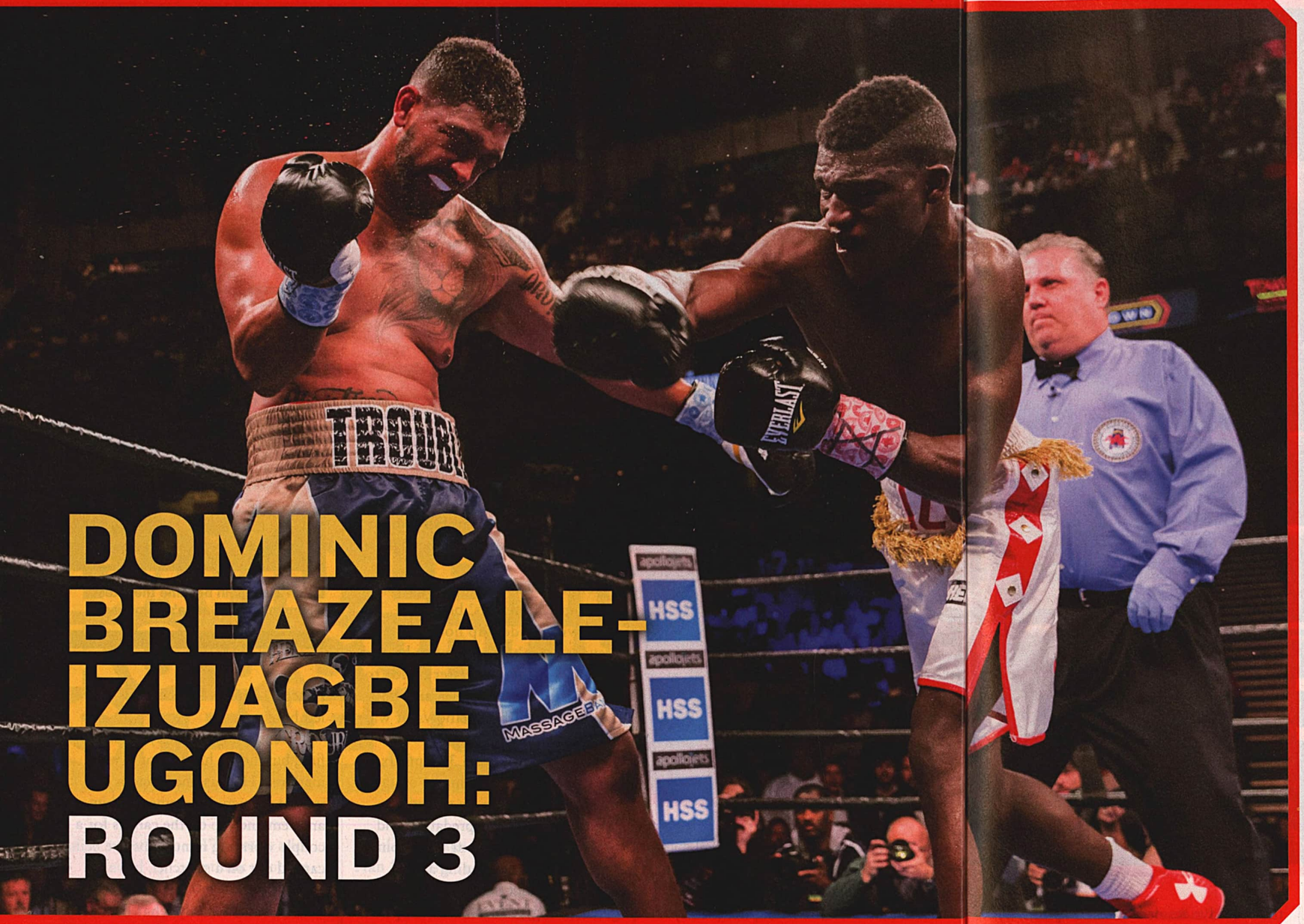
TOM HOGAN/GOLDENBOY PROMOTIONS

RUNNERS UP:

- Joshua Greer Jr. KO 6 James Smith
- Mikey Garcia KO 3 Dejan Zlaticanin
- Zolani Tete KO 1 Siboniso Gonya
- David Benavidez TKO 8 Rogelio Medina

Dejan Zlaticanin became the latest victim in Mikey Garcia's comeback.

BY NORM FRAUENHEIM



DOMINIC BREAZEALE-IZUAGBE UGONOH: ROUND 3

It was part primitive, part sloppy and thoroughly dramatic. For 180 seconds, Dominic Breazeale and Izuagbe Ugonoh mixed wild power and inexhaustible resilience for a roller-coaster ride of a round.

Within just three minutes on February 25, Breazeale and Ugonoh went back and forth, each perilously close to defeat and each able to battle back from the brink. Somehow both heavyweights survived a round that was a fight within the fight at a place appropriately named Legacy Arena. It was a legacy round, THE RING's Round of the Year.

Breazeale wound up winning, knocking Ugonoh through the ropes and onto the ring's apron 50 seconds into the fifth for a TKO on the undercard of Deontay Wilder's fifth-round stoppage of ex-footballer Gerald Washington in Birmingham, Alabama.

It was a concussive end, an exclamation point on everything that was set up in the third. The result is a matter of record. You can look it up. But that third round is a matter of memory, as in unforgettable.

Here's how it happened:

COURTESY OF PBC

Ugonoh misread what he saw in front of him. He threw a wild punch and missed. Breazeale, hurt yet aware of the peril confronting him, reacted quickly and precisely with a short right, an uppercut.

The counter found its mark, landing on Ugonoh's temple. Suddenly, Ugonoh was on the canvas. He scrambled back onto his feet, barely beating referee Jeff Dodson's count. Ugonoh smiled, perhaps because he knew he had survived his own mistake. Little did he, or anybody at ringside, or in the Fox television audience know what was about to unfold. The rest of the round was all about survival. For him. And for Breazeale. Welcome to chaos and courage.

Ugonoh was on shaky legs. You could see his smile. His chin, too. His hands were down. Breazeale, suddenly energized by the fight's quick turnaround, saw an opportunity. But he misread it, in much the same way that Ugonoh had just seconds earlier. Breazeale, a 2012 Olympian who was 17-1 with 15 knockouts going into the fight, attacked and trapped Ugonoh on the ropes. It looked as if Breazeale wanted to finish it there and then.

But Ugonoh (who would go on to score a knockdown of his own in the fourth) had other ideas and surprising energy. He came off the ropes, throwing combinations at a rapid rate. A right stunned Breazeale, knocking the former college quarterback off-balance like a blitzing linebacker. Breazeale held on – held on literally. He grabbed Ugonoh in a clinch that led to both fighters hitting the canvas in a tangled scrum.

Once they extricated themselves, only a few seconds remained in the third. Still, that was time enough for Breazeale to land an overhand right that left Ugonoh looking stunned and vulnerable as he walked to his corner at the end of one crazy round, the best among plenty of good ones in 2017.

After winning each of the first two rounds, 10-9, on the scorecards, Ugonoh (17-1, 14 KOs), a Polish fighter of Nigerian descent, looked as if he were closing in on a quick, definitive finish. About 40 seconds into the third, he rocked Breazeale, landing successive rights and following up with a left.

That's when things got crazy, perhaps because Ugonoh sensed that Breazeale was badly hurt. But

RUNNERS UP:

- Orland Salido-Miguel Roman – Round 8
- Anthony Joshua-Wladimir Klitschko – Round 5
- Canelo Alvarez-Gennady Golovkin – Round 12
- Srisaket Sor Rungvisai-Roman Gonzalez II – Round 4

The leading contenders, each meriting an honorable mention:

Orlando Salido-Miguel Roman, Round 8. Roman won a ninth-round stoppage on December 9 at Las Vegas' Mandalay Bay in a 130-pound bout after a terrific eighth that saw Salido get up from a knockdown and battle back before the bell.

Anthony Joshua-Wladimir Klitschko, Round 5. A crowd of 90,000 at London's Wembley Stadium saw the first real salvo leading up to Joshua's epic heavyweight TKO of Klitschko on April 29 with the bout's first knockdown, the result of a big right hand in the fifth.

Canelo Alvarez-Gennady Golovkin, Round 12. It was a toe-to-toe finish on September 16 to a much-anticipated middleweight fight that ended in a draw at Las Vegas T-Mobile Arena. It looked as if both wanted it to continue in an expected rematch.

Srisaket Sor Rungvisai-Roman Gonzalez II, Round 4. It was historic. Sor Rungvisai (aka Wisaksil Wangek) left no doubt about his first victory, ending any chance the lightest fighter ever to be pound-for-pound No. 1 would regain the mythical title. With a couple of right hands in the fourth, the 115-pound Gonzalez was down and done on September 9 at The StubHub Center in Carson, California.★

UPSET OF THE YEAR

BY MICHAEL WOODS

SADAM ALI UD 12 MIGUEL COTTO

NABEEL AHMAD

The upset of the year can be assessed from multiple angles and is subject to whatever criteria the selection committee applies.

A most unscientific but failsafe filter is this one: Did the act of winning the fight spur fight fans and watchers to blurt, "Holy shit, I can't believe it!"?

The night of December 2, 2017, promised to be a scripted affair, one celebrating the living legacy of Puerto Rico's top practitioner of the sweet science in this era, Miguel Cotto. Acclaimed for his skills and even more commendable outlook on the craft, Cotto sought challenges at every turn and wasn't one to cherry-pick. However, the final bout of his career, to be held in his arena home base of Madison Square Garden, was supposed to be the proverbial gold watch ceremony.

That invitation must've ended up in Sadam Ali's spam filter, because the Brooklyn resident showed up to the party and worked mightily and effectively to wreck it for Cotto. After 12 rounds of combat on this Golden Boy show, all in attendance waited with a mixture of trepidation and a cynic's certainty … would the judges do the "right" thing and give Cotto the W, or would they do the truly right thing and give the nod to the party-planner-wrecker, Ali?

Michael Buffer read the scores … 116-112, 115-113, 115-113. He paused, our pulses spiked … and we heard "Sadam 'World Kid' Ali."

"Holy shit, I can't believe it!" was my reaction from press row. The judges got it right. They wrote on their cards what they actually saw with their own two educated eyes and weren't influenced by nostalgia. Bless them for that. And here's why maybe this ending to the career of Miguel Cotto was fitting and necessary and, counterintuitively to Cotto and his considerable fandom, a net positive.

A man like Cotto is built differently than you or me. He has a warrior's heart; his instincts are to test himself mightily. We contemplate and search for the less arduous path … we fear failure, so we shrink from a test that we aren't likely to pass. Not so Cotto.

This contention is bolstered by insight from Golden Boy President Eric Gomez, who was, along with Roberto Diaz, tasked with making Cotto's last fight. Afterward, I grilled him. How likely did he think the upset was? "Fifty-fifty," Gomez told THE RING. "We wanted to make a good fight. Cotto wanted a real fight." To that end, overtures were made – to Danny Garcia, Mikey Garcia, Errol Spence and Jessie Vargas … they demurred, Ali didn't. And he had to wade through a considerable heap of social media abuse after he took the fight and counted down to December 2. Easy work for Cotto, the fans declared. Ali is a lamb being led to slaughter, coming up from 147 to 154 to play the patsy.

Not so. The memo of what was supposed to happen didn't reach the 29-year-old boxer-puncher, who'd repped USA in the 2008 Olympics but whose career momentum had stalled when he was stopped by Jessie Vargas in 2016.

Ali himself didn't *know* he could pull off this stunner. He told THE RING an hour after he got the decision, when asked if he *knew* he'd win, "I was sure I had a chance to win."

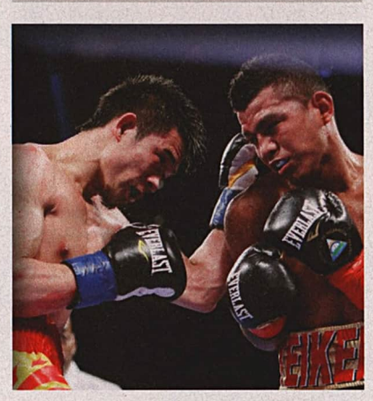
This bout will be one of the handful we remember as years slide by, and it is quite conceivable that while it didn't happen the way it was "supposed" to, it will be for the best. Boxers the make of Cotto, now 37, who trafficked in the sweet and savage science for 17 years as a professional and won six crowns in four weight divisions, like to go out on a high note.

But because of their fierce pride, oftentimes it is better for them to lose. Because losing is a painful injection of truth – that maybe age has caught up to them, that their best athletic days are passed, that stepping off the stage is the wisest option. Because there will be times during Cotto's new era of being a non-active participant of the sport when he will be tempted by the fruits found in this arena. The combo platter of adulation and money is the tastiest. But Cotto can flash back to being in the ring on December 2, 2017, when Sadam Ali proved himself to be the better man, and he can say to himself, "I don't want to believe it … but it is for the best. It's over."

Sadam Ali beating Miguel Cotto stands as the upset of the year in boxing for 2017, but in the grand but oft indecipherable scheme of this existence, it went just the way it was supposed to. ★

RUNNERS UP:

- Srisaket Sor Rungvisai UD 12 Roman Gonzalez
- Tony Bellew TKO 11 David Haye
- Jeff Horn UD 12 Manny Pacquiao
- Caleb Truax MD 12 James DeGale

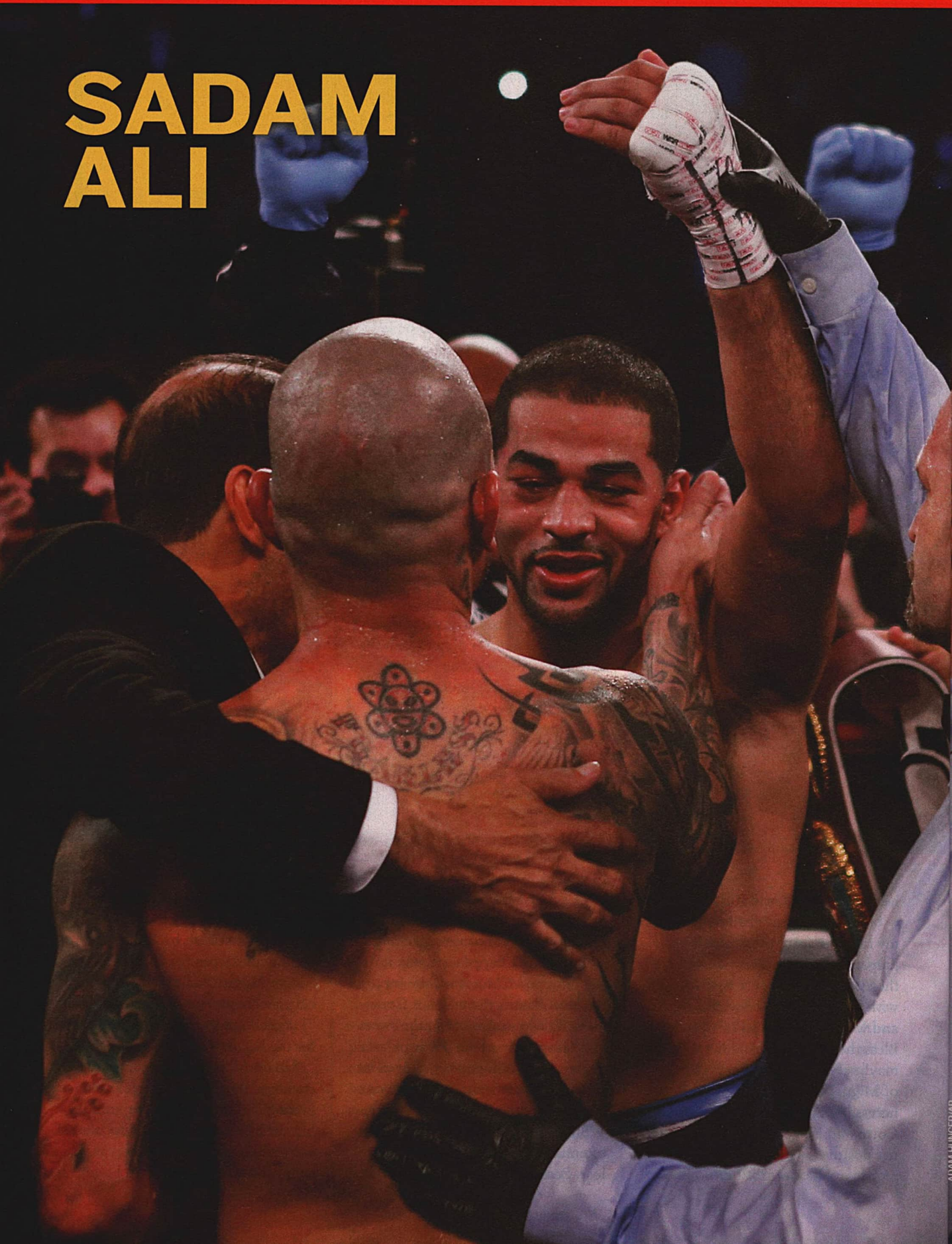


Few believed Srisaket Sor Rungvisai could unseat pound-for-pound king Roman Gonzalez.

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

BY RYAN SONGALIA

SADAM ALI



What was billed as the final bow of a boxing legend ended up as the redemption of a local underdog.

Sadam "World Kid" Ali had been an afterthought for much of the promotion for his fight against Miguel Cotto, who had announced beforehand that their December 2 fight at Madison Square Garden would be the last of his 16-year pro career. It was expected that Cotto would walk out of New York with his hand raised in victory one last time, and that Ali's shot at one of boxing's biggest names would be a passing rub with the sport's elite level.

And it wasn't unreasonable to expect that. Cotto, though mostly inactive in the two years prior to picking up a vacant title against Yoshihiro Kamegai three months earlier, had been competitive with Canelo Alvarez in a decision loss.

It seemed like safe enough matchmaking to put Cotto against a career welterweight who had been off the radar after being stopped in nine rounds by Jessie Vargas early in 2016, and who looked far from a world-beater in three subsequent fights against middle-of-the-road opposition.

The loss was a tough wake-up call for the 29-year-old Ali, who admits that much of his success had come easy in life and left him spoiled, and that he began slacking off in training.

Ali, a 2008 Olympian from Canarsie, Brooklyn, is used to being underestimated. He said it bothered him more when he was told that he had no shot at beating Luis Carlos Abregu, whom Ali wound up stopping in nine rounds back in 2014, than when people assumed Ali would be a perfunctory workout in Cotto's farewell performance.

"I expected people to look down on it and look at it like a fight that's gonna be one-sided and think that it's a waste of time," Ali told THE RING. "I somewhat understood why people would think that way, but I knew they would be wrong. The reason why it didn't bother me so much is I was just waiting for that moment to prove it to them."

When Ali's people heard Golden Boy Promotions was looking for an opponent for Cotto's last bout, they repeatedly called up the Los Angeles-based company (which also promotes him) to pitch Ali as the final challenger for the future Hall of Famer, not wanting to let this opportunity pass them by.

Their persistence paid off, and Ali went to work with trainer Andre Rozier. To the surprise of many, Ali not only weighed more than Cotto (153 to 151.5), he was the bulkier-looking fighter as well.

The crowd was predominantly on Cotto's side, waving Puerto Rican flags and chanting their hero's name, but Ali took the crowd out of the fight with precision right crosses and left uppercuts that rocked Cotto, and soon the minority of Ali's fans were dominating the chanting game. Cotto wouldn't go without a fight, rocking Ali back in the sixth with a right hand and keeping the momentum in his favor in the seventh.

However, Ali proved that he had another gear he could switch to, and in the eighth he recaptured control of the fight and began walking down a faded Cotto.

"I dared to be great," Ali told reporters after having his hand raised and the WBO junior middleweight belt placed on his shoulder. "The most important thing was my preparation … me staying focused and knowing that this is my chance. I'm not in this sport to take easy fights, I'm in this sport to take fights that people think I won't be able to come through with and still do it."

Afterward, Cotto revealed he had suffered a biceps injury in his left arm during the middle of the fight, making it further unlikely that he'll reverse his decision to retire.

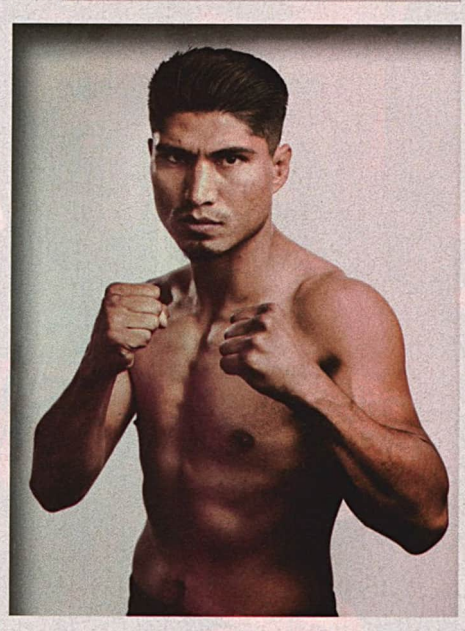
The unanimous-decision verdict was met with boos, though it was clear to most that Ali had deserved the decision. The fans gave him the highest honor later in the night, carrying the new champion out of "The World's Most Famous Arena" on their shoulders onto 7th Avenue.

"It still hasn't fully sinked in," Ali admitted several weeks later. "Things changed – not so much in my life, but in my career. I have a lot more opportunities, more respect, which is what I wanted, because I want to be great in the sport of boxing."

Now the World Kid is a World Champ. ★

RUNNERS UP:

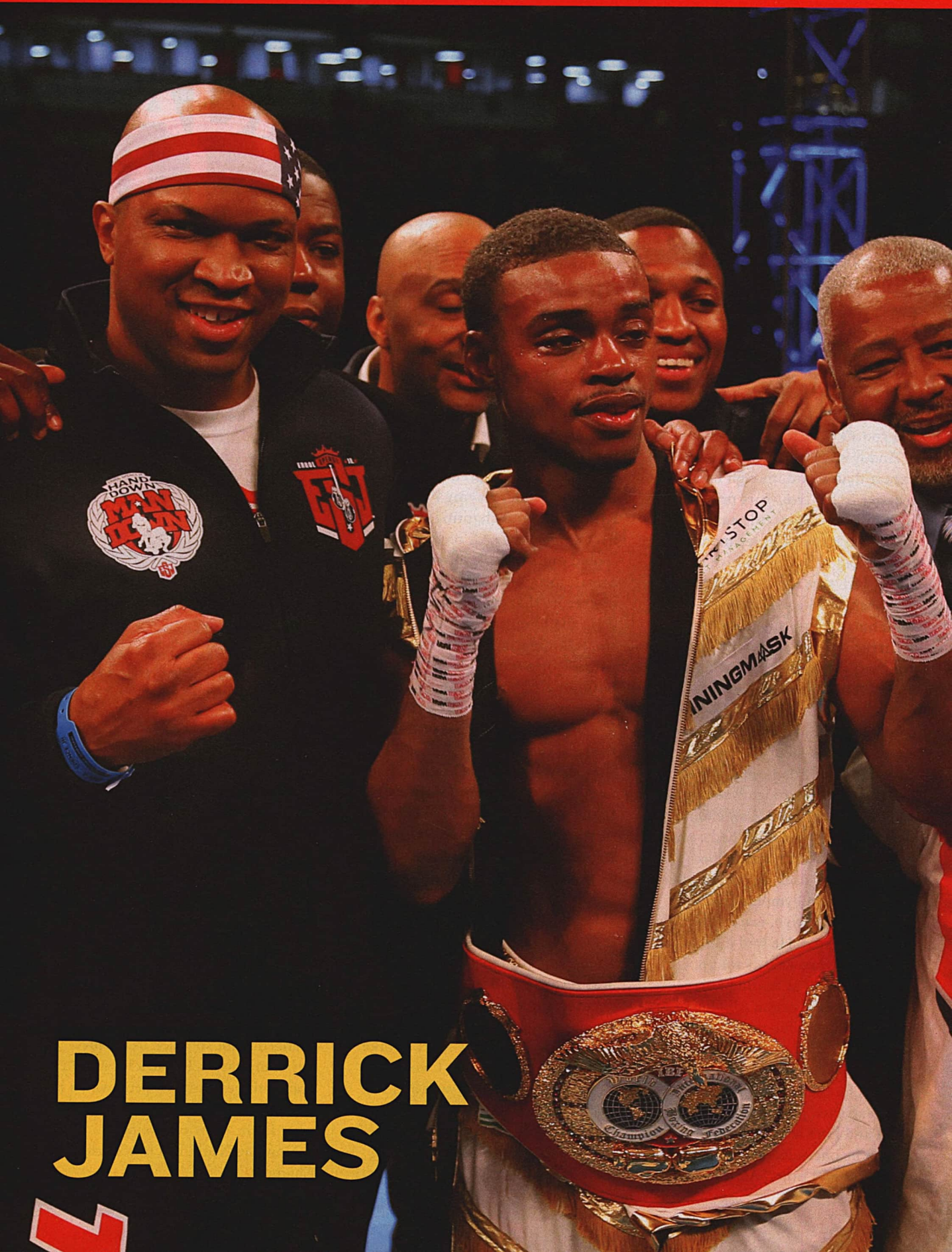
- Mikey Garcia
- Juan Francisco Estrada
- Leo Santa Cruz
- Dominic Breazeale



Mikey Garcia returned from boxing limbo to defeat Adrien Broner and Dejan Zlaticanin, the latter for a lightweight title.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BY MIKE COPPINGER



DERRICK JAMES

When Derrick James pushes his charges just a little bit harder, or challenges the fighters to perform something they might not understand right away, they don't hesitate. Rather than question their trainer, they simply follow his commands, because they know he's been in the trenches, too.

Before James built Errol Spence into an Olympian, a welterweight titleholder and one of THE RING's pound-for-pound rated fighters, the Dallas-based trainer was a professional boxer himself.

James made his debut in 1992 as a super middleweight and eventually worked his way to cruiserweight. He retired in 2008 with a record of 21-7-1 (12 knockouts) and wouldn't otherwise be remembered in boxing, but his second act has been far more fruitful.

Spence traveled to England for an impressive 11th-round knockout of Kell Brook in a welterweight title fight. Training mate Jermell Charlo eviscerated Charles Hatley and then scored the signature win of his career with a first-round, highlight-reel knockout of top prospect Erickson Lubin to retain his junior middleweight strap.

Those three victories netted James honors as THE RING's 2017 Trainer of the Year in a tightly contested race that also included Andre Rozier (for Daniel Jacobs' performance vs. Gennady Golovkin and Sadam Ali's upset of Miguel Cotto) and Anatoly Lomachenko, the father of RING Fighter of the Year Vasyl Lomachenko.

"I work with (Jermell) on defense and I may throw a punch – I'm still active and throw punches at him – and he'll say, 'My trainer is still a fighter,'" says James, who also trains super middleweight Rob Brant at the R&R Boxing Club in Northwest Dallas. "I may land a good shot on him; only reason you land that is because you're a fighter.

"They know that I know what I'm talking about. I've been punched. I train from what I see. But there may be a point where they don't get what I'm asking them to do, and I coach from their perspective."

Clearly, what James is teaching is working. Sure, Brant was surprisingly dominated by former light heavyweight titleholder Juergen Braehmer, all of 39 years old, in October in the World Boxing Super Series.

But the talent – and boxing skills – Spence and Charlo (both undefeated) exhibit can't be denied. Charlo isn't on THE RING's pound-for-pound list, but he's right on the doorstep. The Houston native is rated No. 2 at 154 pounds, and the titleholder's mix of power, speed and stinging jab have made him a force.

He's improved since leaving veteran trainer Ronnie Shields for James, too. After four fights together, Charlo is a more complete fighter now. And when Charlo hurts his foes, he finishes them, usually in vicious fashion (he's far more worried about defense).

Spence, of course, appears to be the complete package.

Spence's father, Errol Spence Sr., approached James at a Black Gloves Boxing Tournament hosted by Hatley's dad in 2008. Spence Jr. was competing and James noticed something: "I said, 'Look, he keeps throwing the same punch over and over.'" A partnership was formed.

Spence won a bevy of national tournaments and went on to represent the U.S. in the 2012 Olympic Games. A decade later, he's considered to be among boxing's best talents.

"Derrick is a great trainer because he's a teacher. He's not one of them trainers today just trying to get you in shape," says Spence. "He's looking for flaws in our game and things we need to do better that an experienced coach would pick up on if they were watching film.

RUNNERS UP:

- Robert Garcia
- Virgil Hunter
- Anatoly Lomachenko
- Andre Rozier

"He's one of the few coaches who puts an emphasis on fundamentals, like using the jab and setting punches up off the jab while staying on balance, and I think what also makes him great: He used to box before. So he understands firsthand what we as boxers go through in camp and the highs and lows of camp."

James didn't know he'd train world-class fighters; he began with white-collar personal training – people simply looking to stay in shape after work in Dallas. But along the way, he discovered a truth about himself: He's a better trainer than he ever was a fighter.

"I love to teach," James says. "I didn't know (at first) that I love to teach, but I love to see something I put together, to see the teaching play out with the guys. But I would not be where I am today if I was not a fighter."

His background is the basis for everything he teaches Spence and Charlo, and there's greater things to come as both men look to defend their respective titles.

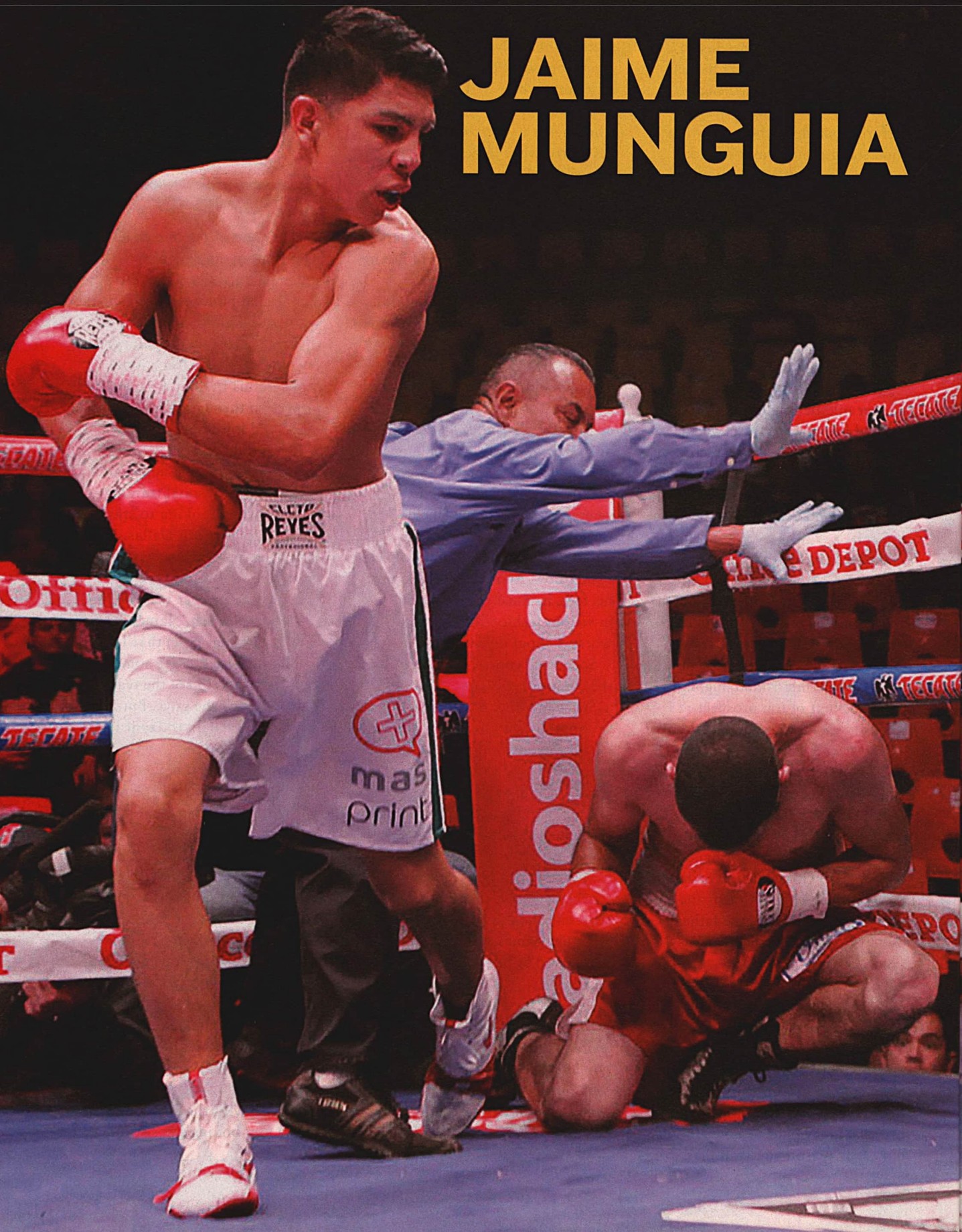
James says he would never take on more than four or five fighters so he can do what he does today: work privately with each boxer so he can critique how each man throws their punches and moves their body.

So he still trains. Still hits that heavy bag. And it's with a purpose: He needs to stay in shape for his fighters and visualize those punches that land with the precision that made him boxing's best trainer in 2017. ★

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

JAIME MUNGUIA



As the calendar turned to 2017, Jaime Munguia was largely unknown. A year later, after seven consecutive victories, he has come to the forefront as one of the brightest prospects in boxing.

Munguia was born and raised in the boxing hotbed of Tijuana, Mexico, known for being a gritty, hostile environment. His father was a heavyweight journeyman in the 1990s and later a trainer, which allowed the family to avoid the type of poverty synonymous with the region.

"Thank God, no," Munguia told THE RING through trainer Noe Alvarez when asked about his early years. "My dad was always a hard worker. We didn't have a lot of things, but we had what we needed."

Unlike many Mexican fighters, especially one so young, Munguia has an extensive amateur background. He went 128-10 in the unpaid ranks, winning a national title at 141 pounds. Too young to qualify for the London 2012 Olympics and unwilling to wait for the 2016 Games in Rio, he switched to the professional game in 2013 at just 16 years old.

Since then, he has stayed very active and progressed significantly in and around the junior middleweight division. He has also enjoyed high-class sparring with the likes of fellow Tijuana native Antonio Margarito, super middleweight contender Jose Uzcategui and another rising young gun, welterweight Carlos Ocampo.

Munguia doesn't have a signature win yet; it's been more about the dominant fashion in which he's won rather than who he's beaten. He has impressive power, predominantly in the right hand, and poise that belies his age (21). And true to Mexican tradition, he likes to work the body – especially the left hook to the liver.

Munguia's best performance to date is a second-round knockout of the heavy-handed Juan Macias Montiel in early 2017.

"(My opponent) was from the Montiel boxing dynasty – they've been in the boxing industry for over 50 years," said Munguia. "The kid came in very strong. He was a very hard puncher, had all his wins by knockout, and I felt really good with that fight."

Munguia (26-0, 22 knockouts) closed out the year with his U.S. debut, destroying the usually durable Paul Valenzuela in two rounds.

That performance caught the eye of THE RING Editor in Chief Doug Fischer, who was ringside for the card, which was headlined by Orlando Salido vs. Miguel Roman.

"People told me (Munguia) was like 'the new Antonio Margarito,' but from what I saw against Valenzuela, he's more athletic and technical than Margarito was.

"It's hard to believe he's only 21, because he's got the patience and confidence of a battle-tested contender. And his power is real. Valenzuela is a tough journeyman/spoiler. He'd gone the distance with Wilky Camfort and Tony Harrison earlier in the year, and I witnessed his upset of then-unbeaten (17-0-1) Antonio Gutierrez in 2015. So, I knew he could be a handful, but Munguia blew right through him and did so by expertly setting up his power. Valenzuela admitted to me afterward that he'd never been hit like that and he never saw it coming."

The power is indeed real and it's big, as are the ambitions it's driving.

"I want to make history," said Munguia. "I want to be world champion in different divisions, defend, fight whoever is the best and give great fights.

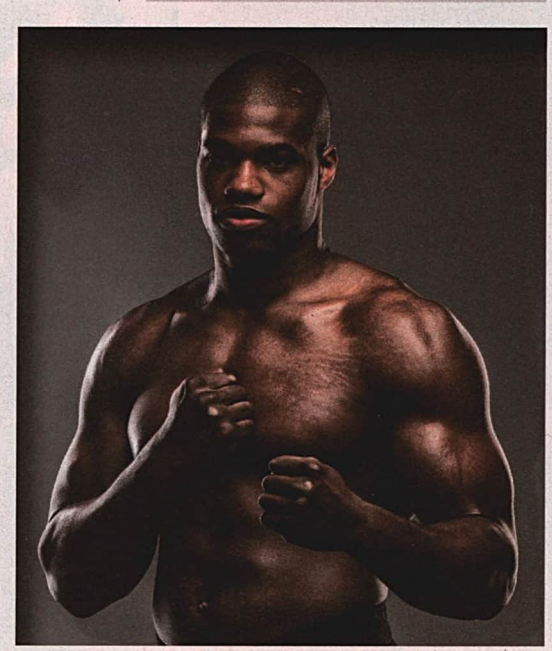
"I want to fight Canelo someday, very bad. There's no bad blood. It's just competition. Canelo is the best Mexican fighter and I want to be there as well, so a fight between the best Mexican fighters would be a great fight."

Munguia is scheduled to kick off his 2018 campaign on February 2 in Cancun. He will likely fight four or five times in the coming year against steadily increasing opposition, sometimes on U.S. television, and, if all goes well, establish himself as a contender with an eye toward a title fight in 2019.

For now, Munguia is THE RING's Prospect of the Year. Beyond that, his upward trajectory could lead all the way to being Mexico's next star. ★

RUNNERS UP:

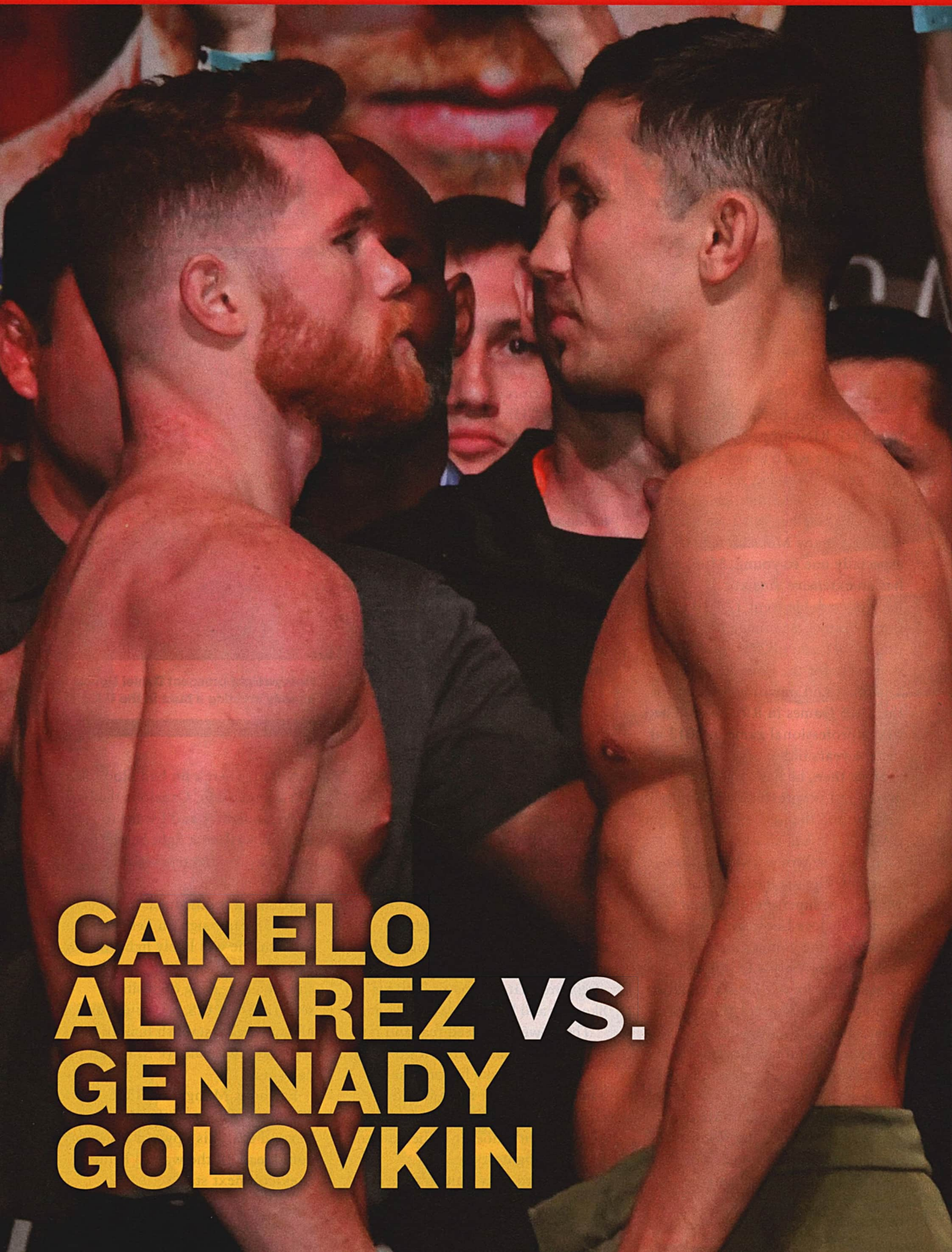
- Daniel Dubois
- Josh Kelly
- Ryan Garcia
- Vergil Ortiz



Heavyweight prospect Daniel Dubois is already creating a buzz in the U.K.

EVENT OF THE YEAR

BY ANDREAS HALE



CANELO ALVAREZ VS. GENNADY GOLOVKIN

It's rare that a high-stakes fight lives up to the hype both in and out of the ring. However, when everything from the pre-fight buildup and quality of competitors to the atmosphere and – most importantly – the fight itself falls in line, the results are majestic.

The September 16 showdown between Saul "Canelo" Alvarez and Gennady "GGG" Golovkin had all of the ingredients for an epic showdown. We had the biggest name in boxing after Floyd Mayweather's retirement against the sweet science's most feared combatant coming together after a wait that was just a notch below excruciating. With nowhere else to turn but to each other, Canelo-GGG lit up Las Vegas on Mexican Independence Day weekend and, somehow, lived up to the expectations in ways most didn't expect.

For the most part, boxing's biggest events over the past few years have left fans feeling empty due to a lack of one important thing: the in-ring action. The excitement levels were low and/or the fights ended up being terribly one-sided.

Canelo-GGG had nothing to worry about in this department.

Perhaps a little of this had something to do with Mayweather and Conor McGregor's boxing "match" that was more exhibition than competition. It was expected that the announcement of the UFC champion making his boxing debut against the "retired" Mayweather would undercut the best fight that could be made in boxing. Instead, it managed to assist in building Canelo-GGG because boxing purists rallied to get behind a true boxing match rather than a "circus."

By the time fight night arrived, the Vegas streets were buzzing as boxing fans flooded the pavement underneath the neon lights of The Strip. A mariachi band seemed to swell into a parade as Canelo fans joined the party while a surprising amount of Golovkin fans carried signs and wore headbands with "GGG" emblazoned across the front.

When the first bell rang, Canelo and GGG came together to deliver a fight for the ages – 22,358 rabid fans watched inside T-Mobile Arena while others combined for roughly 1.5 million pay-per-view buys.

Unlike Mayweather-McGregor – which was an arena that was 3/4 full of bigwigs who sat on their hands for most of the night – Canelo-GGG was filled to the brim with true fight fans eager to see one of the most highly anticipated (and competitive) fights in recent memory. And nobody really knew what the outcome would be; that in itself was why the night was so magical.

What also made the night spectacular was the great divide between the fans. Although Canelo has entrenched himself as a Mexican star, a significant chunk of the redhead's base had been snared away by Golovkin's "Mexican style" of never backing down. With Canelo being more of the boxer-puncher and GGG being a pressure fighter, there was certainly a recipe for fireworks. And once the fuse was lit with the opening bell, the two lit each other up like the Fourth of July with the cheers reverberating off the arena walls.

From the opening round, Canelo-GGG was a high stakes, nip-and-tuck battle where each fighter gave his opponent something they had never dealt with. It was Canelo's brilliant upper-body movement that avoided the lauded wrecking balls known as Triple G's hands, and Golovkin's chin that uncannily absorbed power shots – including a hellacious right cross in the ninth round that is still making its rounds on the internet – and kept plowing forward as if GGG wasn't to be bothered with Canelo's nonsense. Golovkin pursued Canelo like the T-1000 from Terminator 2 while the Mexican boxed brilliantly and refused to let his Kazakhstani opponent mow him down.

Every round was a different variety of toe-to-toe action that kept the fans on pins and needles. At any given moment, it seemed, one punch could have ended the night. Surprisingly, neither fighter tasted the canvas.

It wasn't Hagler-Hearns, but it was an intense 36 minutes where both fighters nailed each other with jarring punches that would have crumbled lesser men. The arena was electric, the fighters unwilling to back down and when the final bell rang, the decision was far from clear. It was almost fitting that the fight ended in a split draw – reason enough for these two to recreate another violent dance.

Although Adelaide Byrd's bizarre 118-110 scorecard for Canelo nearly ruined the night, no boxing fan was left unsatisfied. Nobody needed to carry their opponent to excite the fans, as Mayweather did with McGregor. This was pugilism at its purest. The best fought the best and a fight for the ages was delivered.

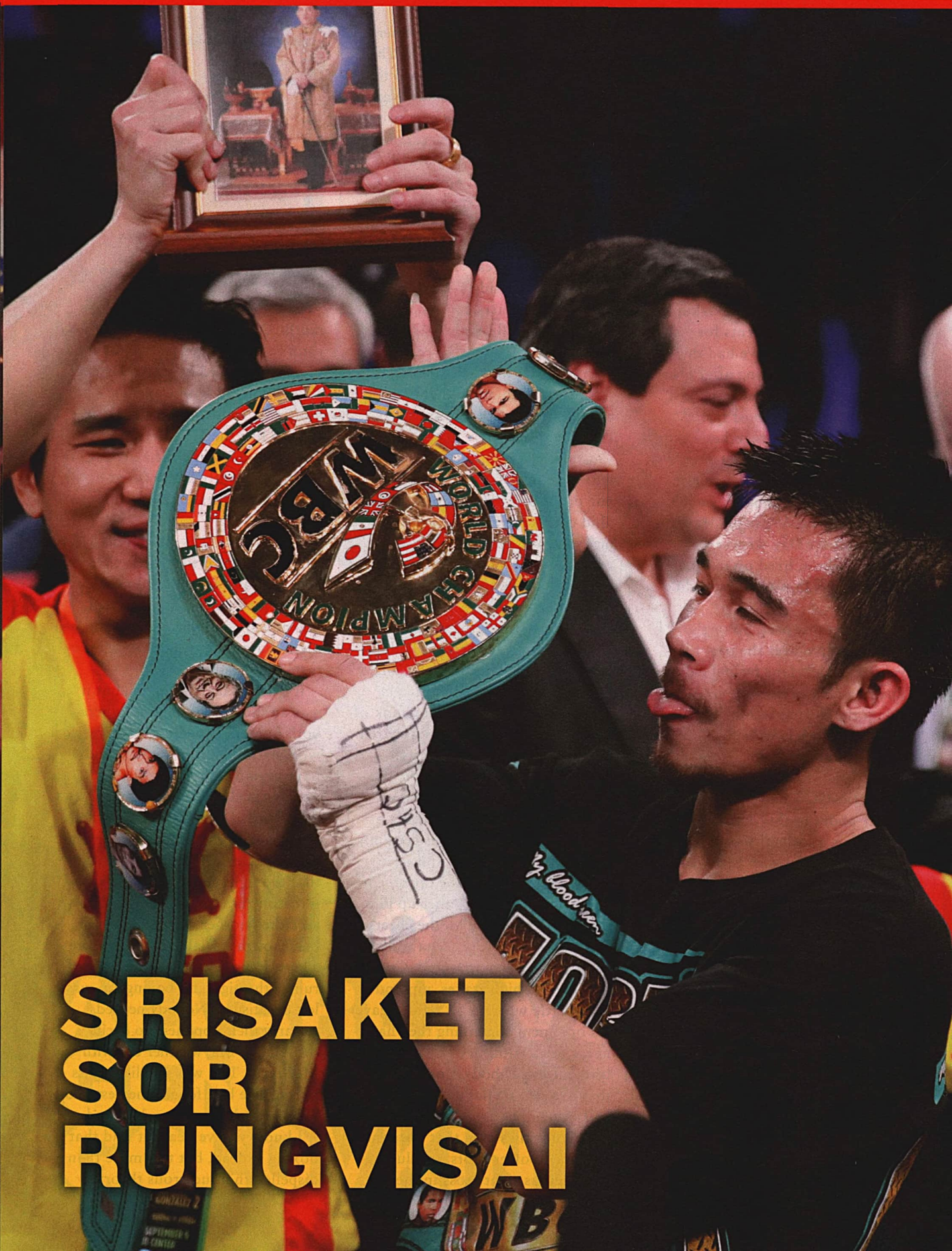
I know you've heard it said that boxing is dead, but this more than dispelled that ludicrous theory. ★

RUNNERS UP:

- Anthony Joshua vs. Wladimir Klitschko
- Floyd Mayweather Jr. vs. Conor McGregor
- World Boxing Super Series
- "Superfly" card

MOST INSPIRATIONAL

BY JOSEPH SANTOLIQUITO



SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI

All Srisaket Sor Rungvisai could do was look up. He didn't have any other direction to consider, or go. Peering down, his raw reality was sleeping on a wooden floor in a crowded, run-down apartment in Bangkok. Looking down meant dinner picked from scraps he thought were edible from the trash cans he was dumping on his route as a sanitation worker, among the many other jobs he held. On good days, he would luck out and find a stale piece of beef or salmon he took home to cook.

It wasn't so much living as it was subsisting. He came from the rural outskirts of Thailand and spent most of what he had in his pocket – which amounted to 50 cents in U.S. currency – to arrive in Bangkok by train in his 20s. There, he and his girlfriend, Kae, settled in with her sister. They lived on instant noodles, which cost three cents a pouch. She would get the noodles. He would sip the broth. Rice was a prime delicacy.

He was at his lowest when Kae almost left him – numerous times.

"It was really stressful back then, because we had no money, nothing, and my girlfriend got really stressed and she asked to leave me many times, because there was really nothing I could provide then," Sor Rungvisai said through a translator. "We were thinking how we would survive. I told her that one day I would make it and one day my hard work would pay off and I would become someone."

In 2017, Sor Rungvisai did. The 31-year-old southpaw made a splash on the international boxing scene by regaining and then defending the WBC 115-pound title by twice defeating Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez, who at the time of their first fight was considered the world's best pound-for-pound fighter. Sor Rungvisai (44-4-1, 40 knockouts) went from unimaginable poverty, working menial jobs as one of the invisibles that people pass by, to suddenly not being able to walk down a Thai street without being mobbed.

Wisaksil Wangek, his given birth name before he came to be known to the boxing world as Sor Rungvisai, always had an indomitable inner will. It's that spirit and drive that has made him THE RING's Most Inspirational Fighter in 2017.

In Bangkok, he walked 16 miles a day to find work. He also began training as a Muay Thai fighter, a kickboxer and, then, a boxer. Each step was greeted with the same refrain from his family and his fiancée's family: "You can't make a career out of it. You won't be successful."

"The honors (in 2017) show what I put into boxing, and where all the hard work went," said Sor Rungvisai, who won the WBC 115-pound title in May 2013 by stopping Yota Sato in eight, then lost the title a year later to Carlos Cuadras by a technical decision. "I have been through so many things. Now that I am a successful boxer, more successful even than what I hoped for, I think of myself not as a world champion but as the guy that had no job and was thankful to get work as a trash collector.

"I don't have an ego, because when you're a trash collector, you can't have an ego. It humbles you. It's why I make sure I greet people, because people go out of their way to greet me.

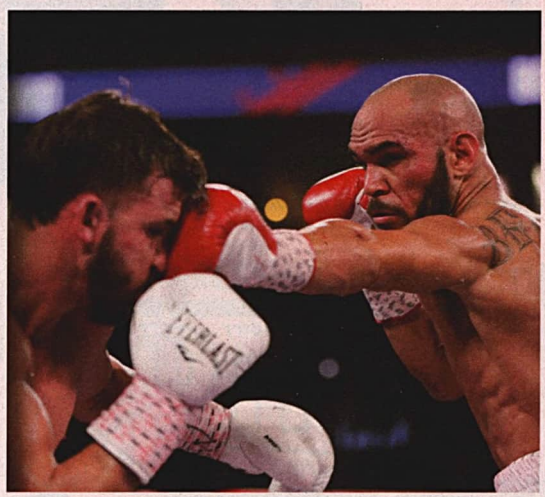
"As a child, I lived what we call a 'sustainable life.' People don't spend much because they don't have much. They make do with what they have. I feel very proud to be considered with the boxing greats today, because I have great respect for them and they're all boxers that I look up to."

When he came home after beating Gonzalez the second time, Sor Rungvisai was greeted by a throng of his countrymen and media at the airport. He spotted Kae from the plane. He cut his way through the gaggle, reached into his pocket, took a knee before Kae and, in front of everyone, proposed.

Looking up, he saw a teary-eyed, beautiful young woman who shared the same dream he had. ★

RUNNERS UP:

- Raymundo Beltran fighting for a green card
- Wladimir Klitschko's last stand against Anthony Joshua
- Luke Campbell and Lee Selby each fighting almost immediately after losing a parent
- Canelo Alvarez traveling to Mexico City to help give aid after an earthquake



Ray Beltran literally fought for the right to remain in the U.S.

BY DON STRADLEY

BARNEY ROSS

THE RING DELIVERS AN AWARD 84 YEARS IN THE MAKING

Though 1933 is generally remembered as a nadir in boxing history – attendance was down due to the Great Depression, and with Jack Dempsey in retirement, the business lacked a big name attraction – it was, in actuality, a year comparable to any as far as drama and thrills. One of the most memorable dates of this 12-month period was September 12, when Barney Ross defeated Tony Canzoneri by split decision at the Polo Grounds in New York. The two future Hall of Famers fought so savagely that United Press correspondent Henry McLemore described the 15-round contest as "a throwback to the days when civilization was just dawning."

Ross had defeated Canzoneri in a 10-rounder less than three months earlier in Chicago to claim both the lightweight and junior welterweight titles. That bout had been a close one, a majority decision. Some accused Ross, New York-born but raised in Chicago, of benefiting from hometown favoritism. Hence, Ross went into the Polo Grounds for the rematch with a fired-up attitude. Ironically, the bout took place in front of a backdrop in preparation for an annual Jewish pageant to be staged the following day, complete with a beaverboard temple on the grounds. Was Ross, the latest in a tradition of Jewish fighters, inspired by what reporter Jack Cuddy called the "ancient Hebrew splendor?" Perhaps. By the end of the fight, the young man born Beryl David Rosofsky had not only won on two of the scorecards but had won over

the more than 30,000 New Yorkers in attendance.

Ross scored six other victories in 1933, two inside the distance. The key win for him was over another future Hall of Famer, Billy Petrolle, on points at Chicago Stadium. The bout, called "a sizzler" by the Associated Press, made Ross a top contender for Canzoneri's belts. A gallery of authentically tough veterans – Johnny Datto, Johnny Farr, Tommy Grogan, Joe Ghnouly and Sammy Fuller – likewise succumbed to Ross' ability. Ross' yearlong campaign should've earned him Fighter of the Year honors from THE RING. But it didn't.

No one was named Fighter of the Year in 1933.

Brief explanation: THE RING's annual award was supposed to go to Primo Carnera, the former circus strongman who ascended to the heavyweight championship that year with a victory over Jack Sharkey. However, Carnera's rumored link to organized crime put the kibosh on that idea. Oddly, the magazine left the designation vacant. Why publisher and editor Nat Fleischer couldn't simply pick another man is a mystery.

This year, THE RING assembled a small but informed panel of writers and historians to fill in that annoying blank space. Granted, we're many decades too late, but it has been a privilege to look back at some of the great competitors of 1933 and present the award posthumously. There were certainly many qualified candidates from which to choose.

The most popular fighter of the day was undoubtedly Max Baer. He fought only once, but it was a classic, chosen as THE RING's Fight of the Year. The opponent, former heavyweight champion Max Schmeling, was out on his feet when the bout was stopped at 1:51 of the 10th. The AP reported that Baer's violent treatment of Schmeling "left 56,000 spectators pop-eyed with amazement." Such was Baer's appeal that he could draw so many customers to Yankee Stadium during the hardest of economic times. Still, it was Baer's crushing right-hand bomb, not his charisma, that left Schmeling hurt and humbled. The first five rounds had been highly competitive, but in the sixth Schmeling left himself open for one of Baer's looping rights. This changed the course of the fight. "Wham!" said Schmeling. "I thought a house had fallen on me."

The bout, which featured the part-Jewish Baer against the German Schmeling, reflected the political rumblings in Europe – Baer made a statement by wearing the Star of David on his trunks – which may have played a part in the event's healthy gate. Baer's other activities in 1933 included starring in his own radio program and playing the lead in an MGM romantic comedy called The Prizefighter and the Lady. His reputation as a Hollywood playboy may not have pleased Fleischer, who believed the Fighter of the Year should set an example for the youth of America, but Baer had transcended the sport like no fighter since Jack Dempsey. He'd undoubtedly become boxing's most recognized household name.

Sore hands kept Jimmy McLarnin from fighting more often that year, but he made his one ring appearance count. On May 29, in front of 20,000 customers at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles, McLarnin won the welterweight championship by scoring a shocking one-round KO of the highly regarded Young Corbett III. McLarnin dropped Corbett three times, the final

THE NOMINEES:

- MAX BAER (1909-1959) ★ Heavyweight (66-13, 51 KOs)
- PANAMA AL BROWN (1902-1951) ★ Bantamweight (129-19-13, 59 KOs)
- JIMMY McLARNIN (1907-2004) ★ Welterweight (55-11-3, 21 KOs)
- MAXIE ROSENBLOOM (1904-1976) Light ★ heavyweight (207-39-26, 19 KOs)
- BARNEY ROSS (1909-1967) ★ Lightweight/ junior welterweight/ welterweight (72-4-3, 22 KOs)

Max Baer only fought once in 1933, but he was boxing's biggest star.

knockdown sending the reigning champ halfway out of the ring. At 2:37 of the opening frame, referee George Blake stopped the massacre and raised the hand of the fighter known as "The Belfast Spider."

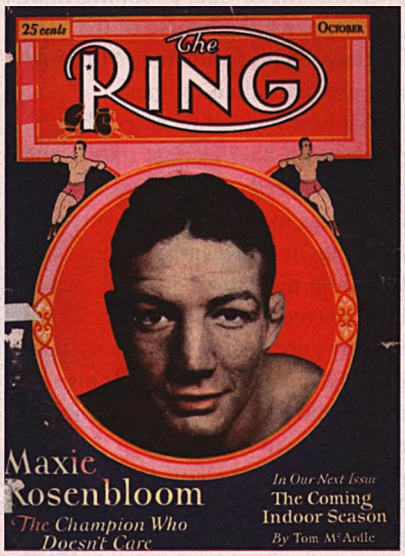
"We both threw punches at the same time," McLarnin said years later, "and I happened to hit first." He added, "It was probably the happiest night of my fight career." McLarnin, born in Northern Ireland, capped off 1933 by becoming a U.S. citizen.

Maxie Rosenbloom fought 29 times in 1933, bringing his comical style to any burgh that would host him. The reasoning behind Rosenbloom's hectic pace was simple: He didn't get paid to skip rope or hit bags in a gymnasium. He got paid to fight, so fight he did, as often as three or four times per month.

The powerful New York State Athletic Commission had recognized Rosenbloom as light heavyweight champion since 1930. In 1933, Rosenbloom took on and defeated NBA champion Bob Godwin in what would now be hyped as a unification bout. Rosenbloom floored Godwin twice in the opening round, then punched him into a crimson mess until the contest was stopped by referee Pete Hartley in the fourth. Hartley's shirt was by then soaked with Godwin's gore. There was some controversy because Godwin was nursing cuts that hadn't quite healed from a previous bout, but that wasn't Rosenbloom's fault. He simply took advantage of what was in front of him, as the UP recounted, "whipping punches at the bloody face from all angles."

Rosenbloom lost four non-title decisions in 1933, but since the hard-partying "Slapsie Maxie" was often nursing a hangover, it's no surprise that he lost a few of his 29 contests. He returned to New York in November and put a bow on the year by notching a decision over the aging but well-liked Mickey Walker. The UP estimated Rosenbloom used his strange, slapping style to take at least 10 of the 15 rounds, "flogging" Walker with both hands "in the manner of a mural painter finishing a rush job." Years later Walker would tell author Peter Heller, "Maxie was a great fighter. They say he was sort of clownish in the ring, but he really was a great fighter."

Enjoying the fourth year of what would be a six-year reign as the generally recognized bantamweight



Maxie Rosenbloom fought 29 times in 1933.

champion, Panama Al Brown's schedule in 1933 resembled the itinerary of a restless world traveler. Eleven times he fought, in locations ranging from his adopted hometown of Paris, to Algiers, to Casablanca, to Milan. Allegedly, American promoters were hesitant to work with Brown because of his homosexual lifestyle, which is what forced him to spend most of his career fighting overseas. Regardless, in a year where many boxing titles changed ownership, this 5-foot-11 stick figure with the 76-inch reach held onto his championship status with an unbreakable grip.

The highlight of Brown's year was when he went to Johnny King's home turf of Manchester, England. Unfazed by fighting in front of King's supporters, Brown put on an absolute clinic and won a lopsided decision. King, admired throughout Europe, managed to go the 15-round distance but was dropped several times and hardly in the fight, much to the disappointment of his loyal British fans. If THE RING gave an award for "Performance of the Year," the leading candidate would be Brown's masterpiece against King. Brown's long career was loaded with great years, but 1933 was arguably the best of them.

It was a year of feel-good stories, such as when unheralded Frankie Klick won the junior lightweight championship by scoring an upset victory on Christmas Day over the superb Cuban boxer Kid Chocolate. Then there was Vince Dundee, an 11-year veteran, finally winning championship prestige by recording his own surprise win over the durable middleweight titleholder, Lou Brouillard. There was the tragedy of Young Stribling's death on a motorcycle, and the excitement of Jose Perez, better known as "Battling Shaw," winning the 140-pound title from Johnny Jadick in New Orleans, becoming the first champion of Mexican heritage.

However, of the many fine fighters at work that year, Barney Ross outdid the lot of them. As one of our panelists noted, "Ross came of age in 1933." Ross' life was full of peaks and valleys, but in 1933 he was outstanding. That's why, 85 years later, he's our pick for Fighter of the Year.

This retroactive selection allows Ross a special distinction, in that he becomes the only RING Fighter of the Year to be honored on three consecutive occasions. Along with our backdated '33 nod, Ross won in '34 (sharing the spot with Canzoneri), and again in '35. No one else, not Muhammad Ali, not Joe Louis, not Manny Pacquiao, turned that trick.

Of course, critics were as prevalent in 1933 as now, and

Ross, even though he'd had a banner year, wasn't immune to negative commentary. Most observers of his time agreed that the 23-year-old was gifted, but he still endured comparisons to the great lightweights of the past, especially the revered Jewish hero Benny Leonard. Neither a big puncher nor a flashy boxer, Ross wasn't likely to compare favorably to a fighter of Leonard's class. During his November bout with Fuller, for instance, Ross was jeered in his own hometown for a fight the UP called "tame," with "few thrills." Columnist Ed Hughes of The Brooklyn Eagle may have been speaking for many when he suggested Ross, though "a fine little fighter," still needed "a world of polishing and mellowing." Some even suggested Ross' victories over Canzoneri were due less to his talents and more to Canzoneri's own slippage. In many ways, the jury was still out on Ross, which could be why THE RING didn't consider him for the year's top honor at the time.

Ross earned around $33,000 for the rematch with Canzoneri and returned to Chicago with plans to buy a house for his mother. It would be the first home of her own since robbers had shot and killed Ross' father, years earlier. Before heading back, though, Ross returned to the Polo Grounds to view the Jewish pageant. Who knows what he was thinking as he enjoyed the spectacle. His parents had hoped he would be a Hebrew teacher, but he went against their wishes when he heard the call of boxing. He didn't start fighting until age 18, but here he was, a mere five years later, a double champion. It was an era when being champion meant more in America than it does now, and being a Jewish champion meant that much more. Maybe Ross wasn't yet ready to be mentioned along with Benny Leonard, but he would be one day. In 1933 he showed a glimmer of the greatness to come. ★

Here's how our panelists reasoned out their choices:

NIGEL COLLINS, former RING Magazine editor: MAX BAER
Max Baer only had one fight in 1933, but it should have been enough to earn Fighter of the Year honors. His 10th-round TKO of former heavyweight champion Max Schmeling drew 56,000 fans to Yankee Stadium and was selected as THE RING's Fight of the Year. Schmeling was still a formidable fighter whose title-losing decision to Jack Sharkey was highly controversial, and his knockout of Joe Louis yet to come. His loss to Baer, however, was definitive and put the American in line to win the title the following year.

CHARLES FARRELL, boxing historian who managed five world titleholders: BARNEY ROSS
After going back and forth with pushing (non-candidate) Jimmy Leto, I'm going to cast my vote with Barney Ross. Two wins over Canzoneri and the victory over Petrolle probably push him over the finish line a nose ahead of Jimmy McLarnin.

DOUG FISCHER, RING Magazine editor: BARNEY ROSS
It's got to be Ross. The two decision victories over Canzoneri alone make him a frontrunner for the honor, but when you toss in a 10-round decision over fellow future Hall of Famer Billy Petrolle and a 10-round decision over RING-rated contender Sammy Fuller, his selection becomes a no-brainer for me.

TOM GRAY, RING Magazine associate editor: BARNEY ROSS
One of the finest fighters of all time, Ross came of age in 1933. Eight wins, no losses, two world titles annexed at different weights and a brace of victories over fellow Hall of Famer Tony Canzoneri. Taking away his physical hallmarks as a fighter – smooth skills, incredible stamina and almost inhuman levels of durability – Ross was also a beacon of hope for the Jewish community during the early rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime. Ross' ability to be a champion outside of the ring was as unique as his incredible talent within it.

LEE GROVES, boxing historian and author: BARNEY ROSS
My vote goes to Barney Ross. First, he won all eight of his fights during an era when producing undefeated years was a highly impressive feat. Finally, I was impressed with the quality of his wins. He twice outpointed future Hall of Famer Tony Canzoneri and, according to the Chicago Tribune as cited by BoxRec, Ross won eight of 10 rounds against another future enshrinee in Billy Petrolle, who, admittedly, was near the end. He ended the year with a successful junior welterweight title defense against Sammy Fuller, a 45-13-3 fighter who came into the bout on an 0-3-1 string. It was somewhat surprising that Ross won by only a majority decision, but maybe it was because Ross was finally running out of steam after such a demanding year. Still, Ross got the "W," which capped an outstanding campaign that I feel is worthy of the 1933 Fighter of the Year award.

THOMAS HAUSER, Muhammad Ali's biographer and author of There Will Always be Boxing: BARNEY ROSS
Not even close.

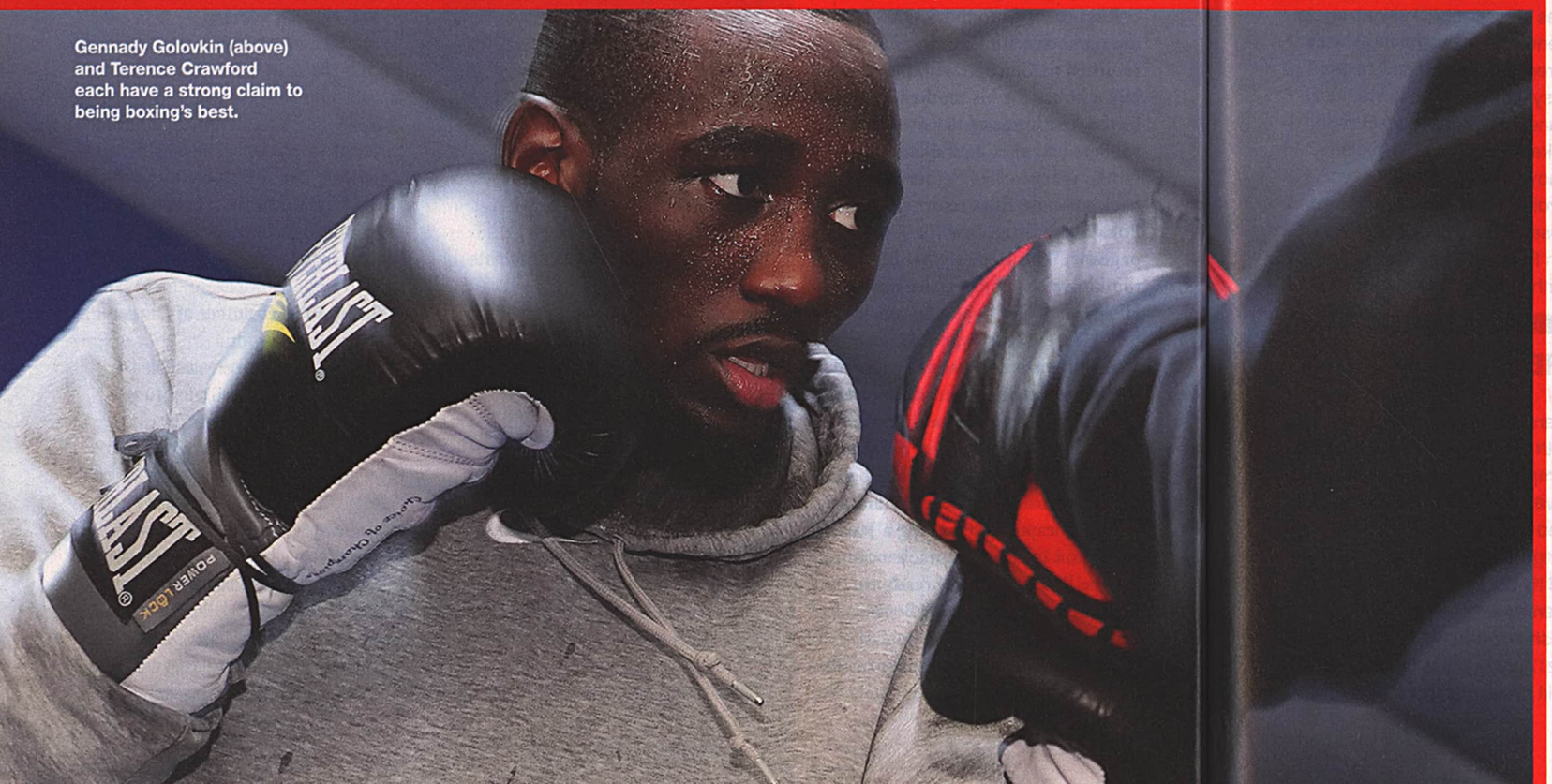
DON STRADLEY, author: MAX BAER
If popularity and excitement mean anything, then I'd vote for Max Baer. It was a down time for boxing and the sport needed a new face. Max Baer was the man for the job. It's tempting to overlook him because he's always remembered as a guy who didn't live up to his potential, but he was certainly great in 1933. That year he was the closest thing boxing had to a true superstar.

SPRINGS TOLEDO, author of Murderer's Row: BARNEY ROSS
In 1933, Barney Ross defeated three fighters rated in THE RING's Top 10 at lightweight and welterweight, two of whom were all-time great contenders in Billy Petrolle and Sammy Fuller, and twice defeated the legendary Tony Canzoneri. Maxie Rosenbloom's 29-fight run in 1933 warranted a closer look, especially considering that Ross only fought eight times that year. However, Rosenbloom's record against contenders was a less-than-impressive 2-3-3. Ross – bolder and more formidable – deserves the honor. ★

BY DOUG FISCHER

SPLIT DECISION

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1980, OUR 'BEST FIGHTER' POLL ENDS IN A DRAW



Gennady Golovkin (above) and Terence Crawford each have a strong claim to being boxing's best.

If there's a central takeaway from this year's Best Fighter Poll, it's that boxing is in a good place in terms of its top talent and its future.

There's usually anywhere from 10 to 50 points separating No. 1 from No. 2 (as you can see for yourself by reviewing the past poll results going back to 1980 on pages 58 and 59).

This year there was a tie for No. 1 (a first in the 37-year history of the poll). And you know what? It's all good. It means there's more than one fighter worthy of the "pound-for-pound king" moniker. It's only been remotely this close three times previously: in 1980 (when Roberto Duran and Ray Leonard were separated by three points), 1994 (when Pernell Whitaker and Roy Jones Jr. were separated by one point) and 2000 (when Felix Trinidad and Shane Mosley were separated by three points).

We can't go wrong with Gennady Golovkin and Terence Crawford (or with Vasyl Lomachenko, who received three No. 1 votes, two No. 2 votes and four No. 3 votes). We're talking about fearless, battle-tested, complete fighters with entertaining styles. The public and media may disagree on who's No. 1, but we know they're all worthy of being at or near the top.

Nine out of the 10 writers polled had the dynamic trio in their top three. Canelo Alvarez occupied the No. 4 spot on six of the lists. Mikey Garcia, who was as high as No. 3 on one list, wasn't far behind the Mexican star, and Naoya Inoue wasn't far behind Garcia.

The Japanese phenom is only 24 years old. Crawford (30), Lomachenko (soon to be 30), Alvarez (27) and Garcia (30) are at the peaks of their physical prowess, as are Errol Spence Jr. (28) and Keith Thurman (29).

Some of the other fighters receiving votes – such as U.K. superstar Anthony Joshua (28), Miguel Berchelt (26), Leo Santa Cruz (29) and Jermell Charlo (27) – are also entering their athletic primes, meaning the future is bright.

And what about the "old timers" – the 30somethings on the list like GGG, Kovalev and Sor Rungvisai? They're hardnosed badasses who make for action fights and welcome challenges from the young guns. No complaints. ★

OVERALL RESULTS

(15 points are awarded for a No. 1 vote, 12 for No. 2, 9 for No. 3, 7 for No. 4, 6 for No. 5, 5 for No. 6, 4 for No. 7, 3 for No. 8, 2 for No. 9 and 1 for No. 10. Number of first-place votes in parentheses.)

Many view Vasyl Lomachenko as destined to top this list.

1T. GENNADY GOLOVKIN – 123 (4)

1T. TERENCE CRAWFORD – 123 (3)

3. VASYL LOMACHENKO – 112 (3)

4. CANELO ALVAREZ – 66

5. MIKEY GARCIA – 57

6. NAOYA INOUE – 36

7. ERROL SPENCE JR. – 25

8. KEITH THURMAN – 24

9. SERGEY KOVALEV – 20

10. SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI - 12

OTHERS RECEIVING VOTES (TOTAL POINTS IN PARENTHESES):
JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA (11), ANTHONY JOSHUA (7), FLOYD MAYWEATHER (6), MIGUEL BERCHELT (5), LEO SANTA CRUZ (5), JERMELL CHARLO (4), OLEKSANDR USYK (3), BADOU JACK (1)

At 24, Naoya Inoue is the youngest fighter in our Top 10 list.

MIKE COPPINGER

THE RING (U.S.)

It's a coin flip between Crawford and Lomachenko, but the edge here goes to "Bud." He's made each outing look easy, no matter the competition, and he had it all: superb timing, mastery of range, speed and finishing ability. The way he handled Felix Diaz, an Olympic gold medalist, proved his class.

1. Terence Crawford
2. Vasyl Lomachenko
3. Gennady Golovkin
4. Mikey Garcia
5. Canelo Alvarez
6. Errol Spence Jr.
7. Naoya Inoue
8. Keith Thurman
9. Juan Francisco Estrada
10. Jermell Charlo

DOUG FISCHER

THE RING (U.S.)

Golovkin isn't blessed with Lomachenko's athletic gifts and he isn't as versatile as Terence Crawford, but to paraphrase James Brown, GGG has paid the cost to be the boss. He scored 23 consecutive stoppages on his way to the top of the 160-pound division, beating every conceivable style along the way. The year the KOs ceased, he showed – at age 35 – that he could handle two very special talents in Daniel Jacobs and Alvarez.

1. Gennady Golovkin
2. Vasyl Lomachenko
3. Terence Crawford
4. Canelo Alvarez
5. Naoya Inoue
6. Mikey Garcia
7. Keith Thurman
8. Sergey Kovalev
9. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai
10. Errol Spence Jr.

TOM GRAY

THE RING (Scotland)

I do not believe Golovkin, unlike most pound-for-pound stars, has any reliance on the eye test. It's clear to see that he's an exceptional fighter, but the reason he's reached the top spot is down to dogged determination, desire and consistency. Like middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins before him, that is what GGG will be remembered for and that's what makes him special.

1. Gennady Golovkin
2. Terence Crawford
3. Vasyl Lomachenko
4. Canelo Alvarez
5. Mikey Garcia
6. Naoya Inoue
7. Errol Spence Jr.
8. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai
9. Juan Francisco Estrada
10. Keith Thurman

ANDREAS HALE

THE RING/YAHOO! SPORTS (U.S.)

For years, Golovkin passed the eye test with flying colors as he mashed the competition to dust. However, 2017 was the year that Golovkin silenced his skeptics. First, he faced the dangerous Daniel Jacobs and proved he could go the distance, and then he excelled in his much-hyped showdown with Canelo Alvarez. Although the fight ended in a split draw, many onlookers had

GGG winning. It'll be interesting to see if he can keep Crawford and Lomachenko away from the throne in 2018, because they are both nipping at his heels.
1. Gennady Golovkin
2. Terence Crawford
3. Vasyl Lomachenko
4. Canelo Alvarez
5. Mikey Garcia
6. Sergey Kovalev
7. Keith Thurman
8. Errol Spence Jr.
9. Naoya Inoue
10. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai

BRIAN HARTY
THE RING (U.S.)

Divisional rankings are for achievements, but my pound-for-pound list skews more toward the eye test and what admittedly is an often-flawed imagination. Two through 10 are all exceptional fighters, but a functional MRI taken of my brain activity while watching Lomachenko would probably be indistinguishable from watching vintage Jackie Chan.
1. Vasyl Lomachenko
2. Terence Crawford
3. Gennady Golovkin
4. Mikey Garcia
5. Canelo Alvarez
6. Naoya Inoue
7. Errol Spence Jr.
8. Leo Santa Cruz
9. Juan Francisco Estrada
10. Keith Thurman

ERIKA MONTOYA
MILENIO DIARIO (Mexico)

In a year of great fights and performances, Lomachenko was the best in my view. Three times he completely dominated and outclassed his opponents, including the respected Guillermo Rigondeaux, which was something I didn't expect. I hope that 2018 brings Lomachenko more demanding fights because I would love to see him perform at the highest level.
1. Vasyl Lomachenko
2. Gennady Golovkin
3. Terence Crawford
4. Anthony Joshua
5. Canelo Alvarez
6. Miguel Berchelt
7. Keith Thurman
8. Naoya Inoue
9. Mikey Garcia
10. Errol Spence Jr.

CLIFF ROLD
BOXINGSCENE.COM (U.S.)

Crawford's wins over Beltran, Postol and Indongo came when those men were rated as the consensus best available opponents in his class. Crawford fights the fights he should and tends to win going away. Skilled, fast, and with a mean streak, he's the most complete fighter in the world.
1. Terence Crawford
2. Gennady Golovkin
3. Mikey Garcia
4. Vasyl Lomachenko
5. Canelo Alvarez
6. Juan Francisco Estrada
7. Keith Thurman
8. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai
9. Leo Santa Cruz
10. Badou Jack

RYAN SONGALIA
THE RING/RAPPLER.COM (Philippines)

Crawford doesn't do any one thing flashy but knows how to get the job done. Becoming undisputed in an era where there are four major belts shows his commitment to fighting the best. Hopefully, he'll find the stardom he deserves at 147 pounds.
1. Terence Crawford
2. Gennady Golovkin
3. Vasyl Lomachenko
4. Canelo Alvarez
5. Mikey Garcia
6. Sergey Kovalev
7. Naoya Inoue
8. Jermell Charlo
9. Errol Spence Jr.
10. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai

ANSON WAINWRIGHT
THE RING (Wales)

Golovkin struggled to get the top 160-pounders in the ring with him for quite some time, but that changed in 2017. He had a tough time with both Jacobs and Canelo, but he showed his mettle and beat both in the eyes of most. He's the most battle-proven elite boxer, but both Crawford and Lomachenko are breathing down his neck.
1. Gennady Golovkin
2. Terrence Crawford
3. Vasyl Lomachenko
4. Canelo Alvarez
5. Sergey Kovalev
6. Errol Spence Jr.
7. Mikey Garcia
8. Naoya Inoue
9. Srisaket Sor Rungvisai
10. Oleksandr Usyk

MICHAEL WOODS
THE RING/NYFIGHTS.COM (U.S.)

Let's start with batting down protests first. No, it matters not that this guy has only 11 pro fights on his ledger. Lomachenko is seasoned … and he makes it look easier than anyone out there currently practicing. Now, does Loma do things that NO ONE ELSE has done? Pernell Whitaker and his super fans would take issue with that. But Loma is an eighth of a notch above anyone else doing this pugilism thing, because you saw how he dealt with a master craftsman in Rigondeaux. This ranking can and will be cemented when Loma goes a bit out of his current comfort zone, and fights, say, a Mikey Garcia.
1. Vasyl Lomachenko
2. Terence Crawford
3. Gennady Golovkin
4. Canelo Alvarez
5. Floyd Mayweather
6. Mikey Garcia
7. Naoya Inoue
8. Keith Thurman
9. Oleksandr Usyk
10. Sergey Kovalev

BEST FIGHTER POLL

PAST POLLS

2016 POLL

1. Roman Gonzalez – 135 (7)
2. Andre Ward – 97 (1)
3. Gennady Golovkin – 95 (1)
4. Sergey Kovalev – 84
5. Vasyl Lomachenko – 62 (1)
6. Terence Crawford – 53
7. Manny Pacquiao – 39
8. Canelo Alvarez – 34
9. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 18
10. Carl Frampton – 9

2015 POLL

1. Roman Gonzalez – 138 (7)
2. Gennady Golovkin – 114 (3)
3. Sergey Kovalev – 80
4. Andre Ward – 63
5. Manny Pacquiao – 50
6. Canelo Alvarez – 47
7. Terence Crawford – 40
8. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 39
9. Tim Bradley – 38
10. Juan Francisco Estrada – 10

2014 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 150 (10)
2. Manny Pacquiao – 89
3. Wladimir Klitschko – 71
4. Roman Gonzalez – 64
5. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 61
6. Gennady Golovkin – 43
7. Juan Manuel Marquez – 35
8. Andre Ward – 28
9. Sergey Kovalev – 26
10. Miguel Cotto – 21

2013 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 150 (10)
2. Andre Ward – 117
3. Tim Bradley – 62

4T. Juan Manuel Marquez – 53
4T. Manny Pacquiao – 53

6. Wladimir Klitschko – 48
7. Sergio Martinez – 47
8. Guillermo Rigondeaux – 45
9. Gennady Golovkin – 28

10T. Danny Garcia – 9
10T. Mikey Garcia – 9

2012 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 136 (7)
2. Andre Ward – 109 (1)
3. Juan Manuel Marquez – 82
4. Sergio Martinez – 76
5. Nonito Donaire – 53
6. Manny Pacquiao – 48
7. Wladimir Klitschko – 33
8. Vitali Klitschko – 18

9T. Timothy Bradley – 14
9T. Carl Froch – 14

2011 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 136.5 (6)
2. Manny Pacquiao – 127.5 (4)
3. Sergio Martinez – 80
4. Andre Ward – 65
5. Juan Manuel Marquez – 57
6. Nonito Donaire – 53
7. Wladimir Klitschko – 33

8T. Tim Bradley – 19
8T. Pongsaklek Wonjongkam – 19
10. Lucian Bute – 11

2010 POLL

1. Manny Pacquiao – 150
2. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 117
3. Juan Manuel Marquez – 76
4. Sergio Martinez – 68
5. Andre Ward – 48
6. Nonito Donaire – 41
7. Tim Bradley – 27
8. Bernard Hopkins – 24
9. Juan Manuel Lopez – 21
10. Wladimir Klitschko – 20

2009 POLL

1. Manny Pacquiao – 144
2. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 126
3. Shane Mosley – 79
4. Bernard Hopkins – 61
5. Chad Dawson – 48
6. Paul Williams – 42
7. Juan Manuel Marquez – 40
8. Nonito Donaire – 22
9. Ivan Calderon – 15
10. Arthur Abraham – 14

2008 POLL

1. Manny Pacquiao – 150
2. Joe Calzaghe – 101
3. Juan Manuel Marquez – 99
4. Bernard Hopkins – 73
5. Antonio Margarito – 52
6. Israel Vazquez – 50
7. Rafael Marquez –31
8. Miguel Cotto – 28

9T. Ricky Hatton – 18
9T. Paul Williams – 18

2007 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 150
2. Manny Pacquiao – 103
3. Joe Calzaghe – 83
4. Bernard Hopkins – 63
5. Juan Manuel Marquez – 58
6. Miguel Cotto – 51
7. Israel Vazquez – 30
8. Kelly Pavlik – 21
9. Winky Wright – 15

10T. Juan Diaz – 13
10T. Oscar De La Hoya – 13

2006 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 141
2. Manny Pacquiao – 129
3. Winky Wright – 84
4. Jermain Taylor – 61
5. Joe Calzaghe – 49
6. Rafael Marquez – 28
7. Ricky Hatton – 23
8. Shane Mosley – 20
9. Jose Luis Castillo – 19
10. Bernard Hopkins – 16

2005 POLL

1. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 144
2. Winky Wright – 113
3. Marco Antonio Barrera – 70
4. Juan Manuel Marquez – 43
5. Rafael Marquez – 39
6. Ricky Hatton – 38
7. Jose Luis Castillo – 36
8. Jermain Taylor – 34
9. Zab Judah – 31
10. Antonio Tarver – 30

2004 POLL

1. Bernard Hopkins – 150
2. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 111
3. Kostya Tszyu – 88
4. Winky Wright – 70
5. Marco Antonio Barrera – 52
6. Manny Pacquiao – 38
7. Erik Morales – 26
8. Juan Manuel Marquez – 25
9. Felix Trinidad – 22

10T. Diego Corrales – 11
10T. Rafael Marquez –11

2003 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 142
2. Bernard Hopkins – 114
3. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 97
4. Shane Mosley – 53
5. Kostya Tszyu – 48
6. Oscar De La Hoya – 45
7. Manny Pacquiao – 38
8. James Toney – 35
9. Erik Morales – 31
10. Lennox Lewis – 22

2002 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 135
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 89

3T. Marco Antonio Barrera – 78
3T. Vernon Forrest – 78
3T. Bernard Hopkins – 78

6. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 45
7. Lennox Lewis – 43
8. Kostya Tszyu – 42
9. Erik Morales – 25
10. Shane Mosley – 13

2001 POLL

1. Shane Mosley – 132
2. Roy Jones – 108
3. Bernard Hopkins – 98
4. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 77
5. Marco Antonio Barrera – 44
6. Oscar De La Hoya – 40
7. Felix Trinidad – 39
8. Kostya Tszyu – 34
9. Lennox Lewis – 23
10. Ricardo Lopez – 22

2000 POLL

1. Felix Trinidad – 126
2. Shane Mosley – 123
3. Roy Jones – 109
4. Oscar De La Hoya – 43
5. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 39
6. Naseem Hamed – 37
7. Ricardo Lopez – 35
8. Diego Corrales – 33
9. Bernard Hopkins – 32
10. Lennox Lewis – 31

1999 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 150
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 85
3. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 78

4T. Shane Mosley – 68
4T. Felix Trinidad – 68

6T. Mark Johnson – 47
6T. Ricardo Lopez – 47
8. Erik Morales – 21
9. Bernard Hopkins – 16
10. Fernando Vargas – 15

1998 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 141
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 123
3. Felix Trinidad – 67
4. Shane Mosley – 65
5. Evander Holyfield – 55
6. Mark Johnson – 45
7. Naseem Hamed – 33
8. Ricardo Lopez – 23
9. Floyd Mayweather Jr. – 19
10. Pernell Whitaker – 14

1997 POLL

1. Oscar De La Hoya – 123
2. Roy Jones – 117
3. Ricardo Lopez – 83
4. Evander Holyfield – 80
5. Felix Trinidad – 65
6. Pernell Whitaker – 37
7. Naseem Hamed – 28
8T. Mark Johnson – 22
8T. Junior Jones – 22
10. Johnny Tapia – 18

1996 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 123
2. Oscar De La Hoya – 107
3. Pernell Whitaker – 92
4. Evander Holyfield – 64
5. Felix Trinidad – 59
6. Ricardo Lopez – 56
7. Terry Norris – 28
8. Ike Quartey – 21
9. Azumah Nelson – 12
10. Yuri Arbachakov – 11

1995 POLL

1. Roy Jones – 138
2. Pernell Whitaker – 126
3. Oscar De La Hoya – 74
4. Felix Trinidad – 59
5. Marco Antonio Barrera – 48
6. Riddick Bowe – 44
7. Ricardo Lopez – 37
8. Julio Cesar Chavez – 18
9. Ike Quartey – 16
10. Naseem Hamed – 12

1994 POLL

1. Pernell Whitaker – 130
2. Roy Jones – 129
3. Frankie Randall – 53
4. Ricardo Lopez – 45
5. Orlando Canizales – 39
6. Chiquita Gonzalez – 38
7. James Toney – 36
8. Gerald McClellan – 33
9. Felix Trinidad –29
10. Kevin Kelley – 28

1993 POLL

1. Pernell Whitaker – 147
2. Julio Cesar Chavez – 86
3. Terry Norris – 84
4. James Toney – 76
5. Michael Carbajal – 39
6. Evander Holyfield – 36
7. Buddy McGirt – 28
8. Roy Jones – 23
9. Orlando Canizales – 22
10. Ricardo Lopez – 21

1992 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez – 136
2. Terry Norris – 91
3. Pernell Whitaker – 85
4. Buddy McGirt – 60
5. Riddick Bowe – 45
6. Orlando Canizales – 36
7. Azumah Nelson –34
8. Lennox Lewis – 24
9. Julian Jackson – 18
10T. Roy Jones – 15
10T. Mike McCallum – 15

1991 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez – 138
2. Pernell Whitaker – 100
3. Evander Holyfield – 78
4. Mike Tyson – 55
5. Meldrick Taylor – 48
6. Mike McCallum – 38
7. Thomas Hearns – 34
8. Khaosai Galaxy – 25
9. Terry Norris – 22
10. Simon Brown – 21

1990 POLL

1. Julio Cesar Chavez – 123
2. Pernell Whitaker – 104
3. Mike Tyson – 71
4. Meldrick Taylor – 57
5. Buster Douglas – 51
6. Simon Brown – 27
7. Antonio Esparragoza – 25
8. Michael Nunn – 23
9. Evander Holyfield – 21
10. Humberto Gonzalez – 14

1989 POLL

1. Mike Tyson – 147
2. Julio Cesar Chavez – 91
3. Meldrick Taylor – 61
4. Michael Nunn – 60
5. Evander Holyfield – 56
6. Pernell Whitaker – 46
7. Ray Leonard – 28
8. Jeff Fenech – 27
9. Azumah Nelson – 18
10. Marlon Starling – 16

1988 POLL

1. Mike Tyson – 144
2. Julio Cesar Chavez – 118
3. Evander Holyfield – 66
4. Ray Leonard – 55
5. Jeff Fenech – 44
6. Michael Nunn – 33
7. Azumah Nelson – 32
8. Jung-Koo Chang – 23
9. Buddy McGirt – 21
10. Sumbu Kalambay – 18

NO POLL IN 1987

1986 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 138
2. Mike Tyson – 92
3. Donald Curry – 59
4. Thomas Hearns – 52
5. Edwin Rosario – 47
6T. Azumah Nelson – 45
6T. Michael Spinks – 45
8. Evander Holyfield – 32
9. Julio Cesar Chavez – 26
10. Hector Camacho – 22

1985 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 150
2. Hector Camacho – 86
3. Michael Spinks – 85
4. Donald Curry – 78
5. Thomas Hearns – 42
6. Barry McGuigan – 32
7. Milton McCrory – 25
8T. Julio Cesar Chavez – 22
8T. Pinklon Thomas – 22
10. Larry Holmes – 21

1984 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 112
2. Aaron Pryor – 77
3. Larry Holmes –72
4. Eusebio Pedroza – 66
5. Hector Camacho – 50
6T. Jeff Chandler – 47
6T. Ray Leonard – 47
8. Michael Spinks – 45
9. Thomas Hearns – 34
10. Donald Curry – 26

1983 POLL

1. Marvin Hagler – 147
2. Aaron Pryor – 93
3. Larry Holmes – 91
4. Michael Spinks – 66
5. Jeff Chandler – 57
6. Thomas Hearns – 45
7. Alexis Arguello – 29
8. Wilfredo Gomez – 28
9. Hector Camacho – 24
10. Eusebio Pedroza – 12

1982 POLL

1. Ray Leonard – 147
2. Alexis Arguello – 97
3. Marvin Hagler – 76
4. Salvador Sanchez – 72
5. Wilfred Benitez – 68
6. Larry Holmes – 61
7. Jeff Chandler – 25
8. Eusebio Pedroza – 18
9. Aaron Pryor – 17
10T. Thomas Hearns – 14
10T. Dwight Muhammad Qawi – 14

1981 POLL

1. Thomas Hearns – 116
2. Ray Leonard – 108
3. Marvin Hagler –76
4. Larry Holmes – 75
5. Alexis Arguello – 62
6. Wilfredo Gomez – 58
7. Eddie Mustafa Muhammad –28
8. Matthew Saad Muhammad – 24
9. Wilfred Benitez – 18
10T. Roberto Duran – 13
10T. Aaron Pryor – 13

1980 POLL

1. Roberto Duran – 96
2. Ray Leonard – 93
3. Wilfredo Gomez – 88
4. Danny Lopez – 65
5. Pipino Cuevas – 54
6. Alexis Arguello – 40
7. Larry Holmes – 32
8. Wilfred Benitez – 26
9T. Vito Antuofermo – 25
9T. Matthew Saad Muhammad – 25

HIGHLY UNOFFICIAL AWARDS

BY DAVID GREISMAN

C.J. ROSS OF THE YEAR
Adalaide Byrd

THE MOST FRIGHTENING THING ABOUT ADALAIDE BYRD
She's still scoring fights, sitting ringside for three cards in October and November.

THE SECOND MOST FRIGHTENING THING ABOUT ADALAIDE BYRD
She trained other judges on behalf of the Nevada State Athletic Commission.

STEVE HARVEY MOMENT OF THE YEAR
Michael Buffer, who initially announced the wrong winner (Carlos Estrada) for Juan Francisco Estrada vs. Carlos Cuadras.

PUTTING THE "FAST" IN "BELFAST"
Zolani Tete knocked out Siboniso Gonya in just 11 seconds on a November card in Northern Ireland's capital.

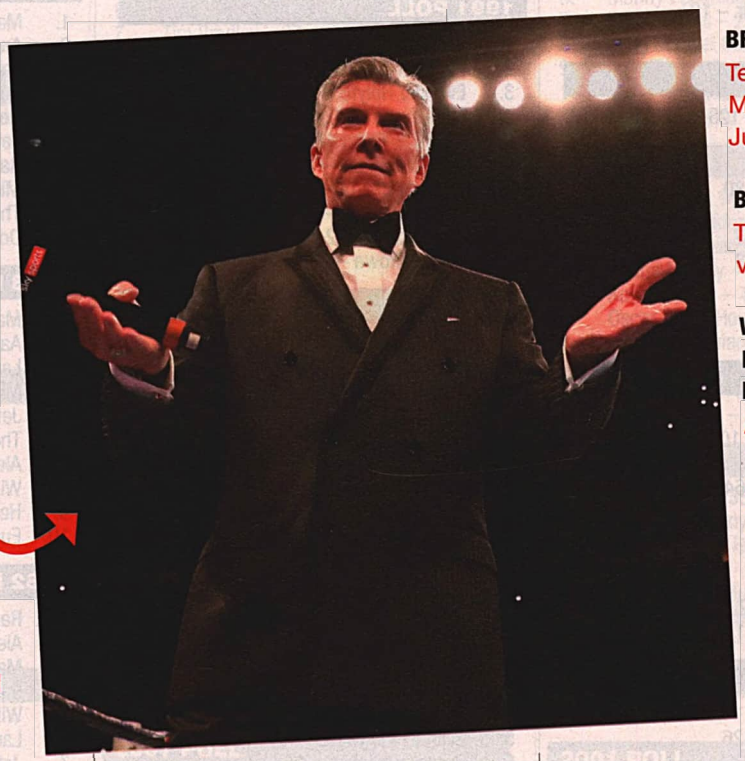
"VICIOUS AND DELICIOUS" AWARD
Juan Manuel Marquez celebrated his retirement with a cake featuring a figurine of himself standing tall over a knocked-out Manny Pacquiao.

ORLANDO SALIDO "LOW BLOW YOUR WAY TO VICTORY" AWARD
Andre Ward

KEEP IT GOING AND HE'LL BE LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION SOMEDAY
Billy Joe Saunders' young son went below Willie Monroe's belt with a punch and a kick at their weigh-in.

MANNY PACQUIAO "RAGS TO RICHES" AWARD
Srisaket Sor Rungvisai has gone from eating out of trash cans to being one of the best 115-pound fighters in the world.

INIGO MONTOYA "I DON'T THINK THAT WORD MEANS WHAT YOU THINK IT MEANS" AWARD
Adonis Stevenson and the WBC, which last saw a "mandatory" defense of its light heavyweight title in 2013.



TALK ABOUT PISSED OFF ...
DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley beat up his son in sparring after the kid urinated in a cup of coffee and then gave it to Corley to drink.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES
Lee Baxter Promotions had a boxing event on 4/20 called "Light Em Up" but someone didn't get Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. and Chris Arreola on the card.

WHAT OSCAR DE LA HOYA SAID ABOUT CONOR MCGREGOR BOXING IN 2016
"The only fight I would love to see ... is [McGregor vs.] Canelo Alvarez."

WHAT DE LA HOYA SAID ABOUT MAYWEATHER VS. MCGREGOR
"F*** you. Both of you are disrespecting the sport of boxing."

WHAT DE LA HOYA SAID A FEW MONTHS AFTER MAYWEATHER-MCGREGOR
"I know I can take out Conor McGregor in two rounds. I'll come back for that fight."

BRIAN KENNY IN 2006
Tearing into Floyd Mayweather vs. Zab Judah.

BRIAN KENNY IN 2017
Touting Mayweather vs. McGregor.

WHAT COUNTS AS BOXING NEWS THESE DAYS
Actual headline: "Floyd Mayweather upset with Justin Bieber after being unfollowed on Instagram"

THE ONLY UNIFIED CHAMP IN BOXING
It isn't Terence Crawford. It's female welterweight Cecilia Braekhus, who's owned all four sanctioning-body titles since 2014.

"CAPTAIN OBVIOUS" AWARD
Shannon Briggs tested positive for elevated testosterone levels prior to a scheduled fight with Fres Oquendo.

CHARLES MARTIN "WORST PERFORMANCE IN A HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE FIGHT" AWARD
Bermane Stiverne threw four punches, landing none of them, before getting knocked out by Deontay Wilder.

STILL LIGHTER THAN TYSON FURY
Jarrell Miller reportedly lost 40 pounds before tipping the scales at 298¾ pounds for his fight with Gerald Washington.

WHAT WELTERWEIGHTS WANT TO BE
The next Ray Charles Leonard.

WHAT KELL BROOK IS IN DANGER OF BECOMING
The next Ray Charles.

SIX-TOED FIGHTER OF THE YEAR
Danny Garcia

SERGIO MARTINEZ "BEST ONE-LEGGED ARGENTINE MIDDLEWEIGHT" AWARD
Jorge Heiland, who came in with a limp and went out with a whimper against Jermall Charlo.

KO VICTIM FACE OF THE YEAR
Dmitry Kudryashov, after Yunier Dorticos dropped him for the count in just two rounds.

MOST EXPENSIVE INFOMERCIAL
The Canelo Alvarez vs. Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. pay-per-view, which was uncompetitive in the ring and essentially served as a paid announcement for Canelo vs. Gennady Golovkin.

THIS YEAR IN ALLIGATOR/BOXING NEWS
Oscar Valdez bought one as a pet. Egor Klitschko (teenage son of Vitali) was bitten by one. And the WBC made a belt for Mayweather vs. McGregor out of gator leather. No wonder Valdez fights for the WBO title.

ANDRE DIRRELL-ARTHUR ABRAHAM AWARD
Andre Dirrell's fight with Jose Uzcategui also ended on a DQ, with Dirrell going down from a blow after the bell.

FOR THOSE WHO THINK DIRRELL FLOPPED AGAINST ABRAHAM
Dirrell told the referee he was fine after the Uzcategui shot, but his corner told him to stay down, helping ensure the disqualification.

CHEAP SHOT OF THE YEAR
Dirrell's uncle and trainer, Leon Lawson, then socked Uzcategui with a left hook before fleeing through the crowd and leaving the state before police could arrest him.

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN
Hector Camacho Jr. came back, came in massively overweight, and lost.

CORNER FRANCISCO ROJO (SPANISH FOR "RED") WAS IN AGAINST RYAN MARTIN
Blue

CORNER THAT RYAN "BLUE CHIP" MARTIN WAS IN AGAINST FRANCISCO ROJO
Red

THE RAP/BOXING CURSE CONTINUES
Lil Wayne signed Erickson Lubin weeks before the 154-pound prospect suffered a one-round KO loss to Jermell Charlo.

BEST POWER COUPLES
Two-time gold medalist Nicola Adams and bronze medalist Marlen Esparza; gold medalists Tony Yoka and Estelle Mossely.

WHAT CLETUS SELDIN DID IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2017
Tested positive twice for banned substances, each time with an astronomic testosterone to epitestosterone ratio beyond 20:1 (the allowable limit is 4:1).

WHAT CLETUS SELDIN WAS THEN ABLE TO DO IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2017
Appear twice on HBO, and in back-to-back months, at that.

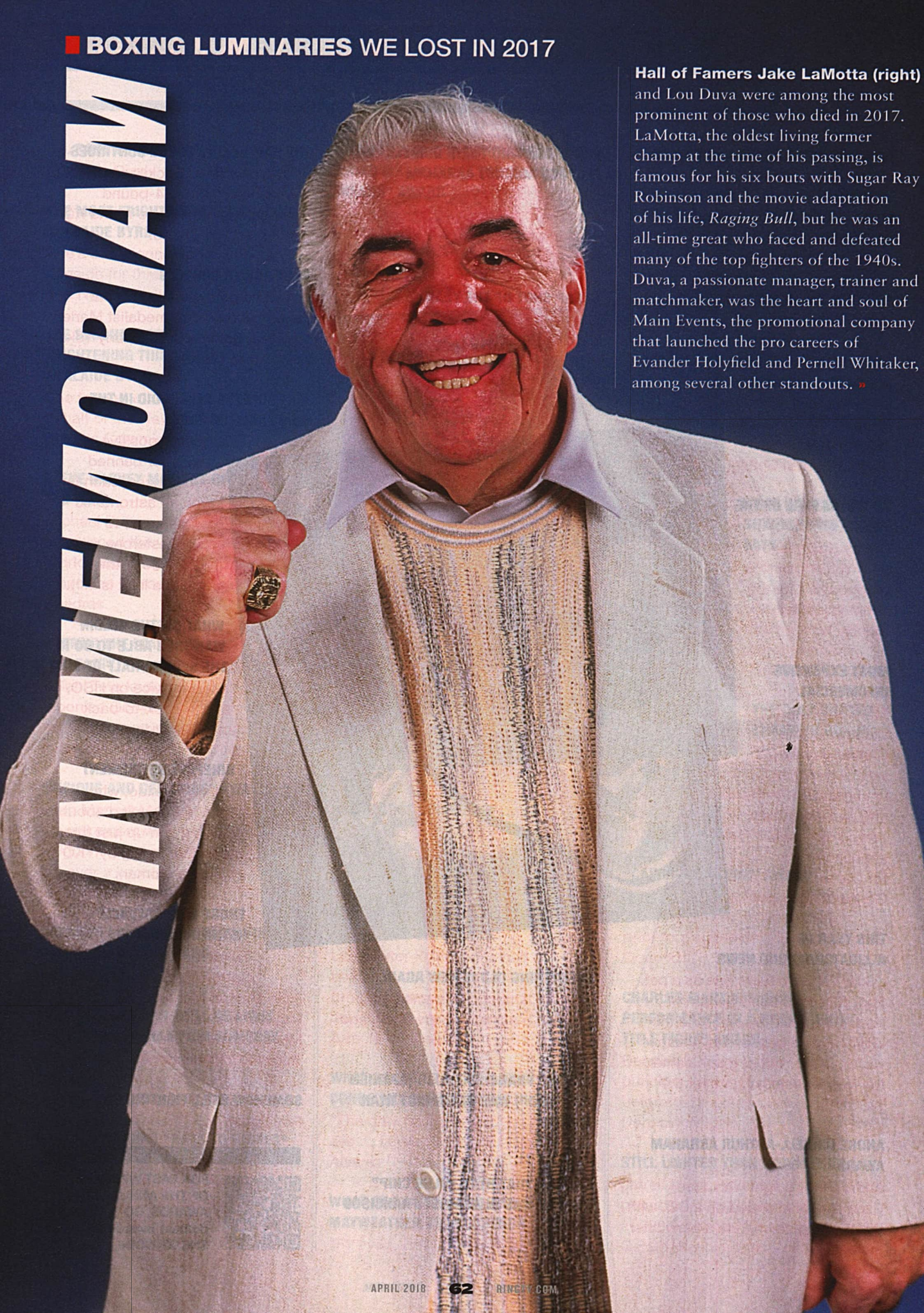
BRIEFEST RETIREMENT
Orlando Salido, who changed his mind about hanging 'em up just three days after losing by TKO to Miguel Roman.

THOSE WHO ACTUALLY RETIRED IN 2017
Tim Bradley, Miguel Cotto, Wladimir Klitschko, Juan Manuel Marquez, Floyd Mayweather Jr. (again), Takashi Miura, Shane Mosley, Jean Pascal, Takashi Uchiyama and Andre Ward.

SOMEHOW STILL FIGHTING ON ...
Roy Jones Jr.

FOR PAST WINNERS OF THE ANNUAL RING AWARDS, GO TO http://bit.do/past_awards OR SCAN THE QR CODE.

IN MEMORIAM



Hall of Famers Jake LaMotta (right) and Lou Duva were among the most prominent of those who died in 2017. LaMotta, the oldest living former champ at the time of his passing, is famous for his six bouts with Sugar Ray Robinson and the movie adaptation of his life, *Raging Bull*, but he was an all-time great who faced and defeated many of the top fighters of the 1940s. Duva, a passionate manager, trainer and matchmaker, was the heart and soul of Main Events, the promotional company that launched the pro careers of Evander Holyfield and Pernell Whitaker, among several other standouts. »

The others (listed in alphabetical order):

David Bey – Former heavyweight title challenger who lost to Larry Holmes in 1985, but defeated Buster Douglas (in Bey's pro debut) and Greg Page on his way up the rankings.

Errol Christie – Former British amateur standout and professional middleweight.

Cesar Diaz – Former U.S. amateur standout and promising bantamweight prospect signed to Golden Boy Promotions.

Terry Downes – Former middleweight contender who had a nine-month reign as RING middleweight champion between his three-fight series with Paul Pender. The London native also defeated aging legend Sugar Ray Robinson and Hall of Famer Joey Giardello during his respectable career.

Angelique Duchemin – Unbeaten European featherweight champ from France.

Nick Durandt – Prolific world-class trainer from South Africa who helped guide several boxers to world titles, including Thulani "Sugar Boy" Malinga, Cassius Baloyi and Zolani Tete.

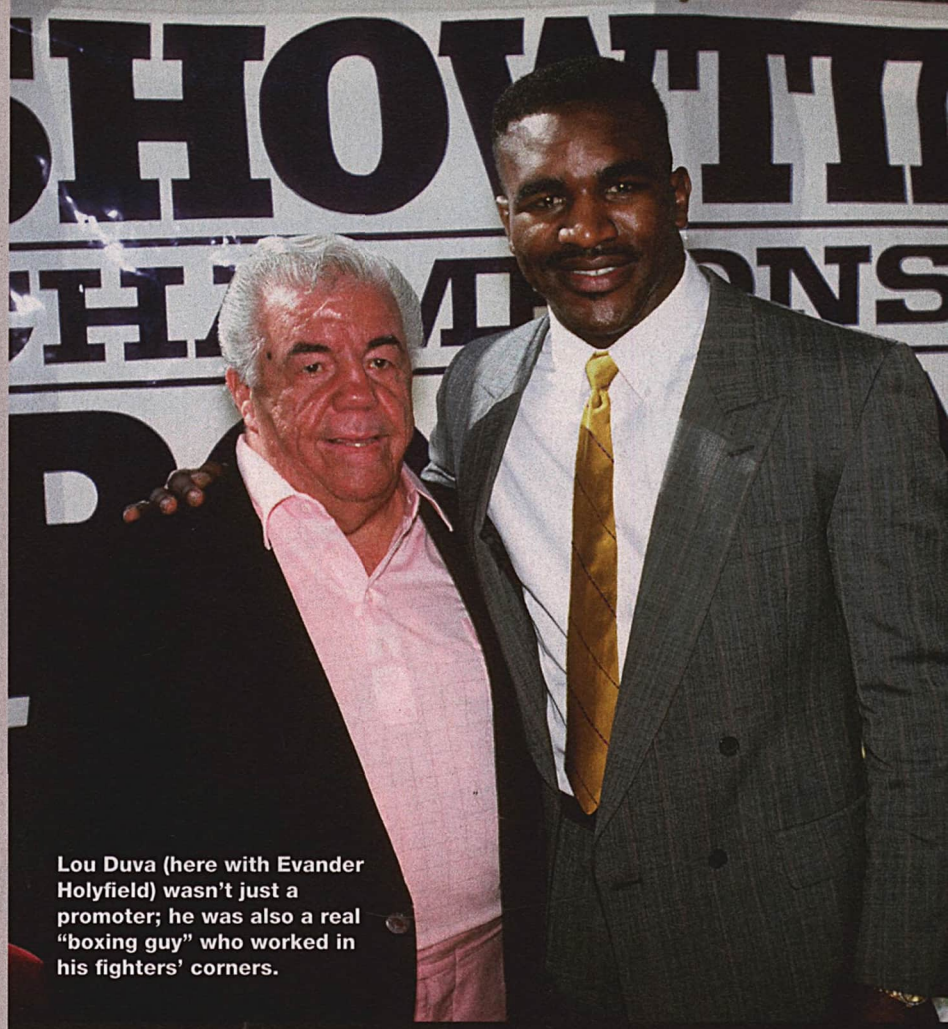
Dick Enberg – Legendary sports broadcaster who did the call for the Olympic Auditorium boxing series in Los Angeles at the start of his career during the 1960s.

Angel Espinosa – Cuban amateur standout who won the 1986 World Amateur Championships (at junior middleweight) but was unable to compete in the 1984 and 1988 Olympics due his nation's boycott of those Games.

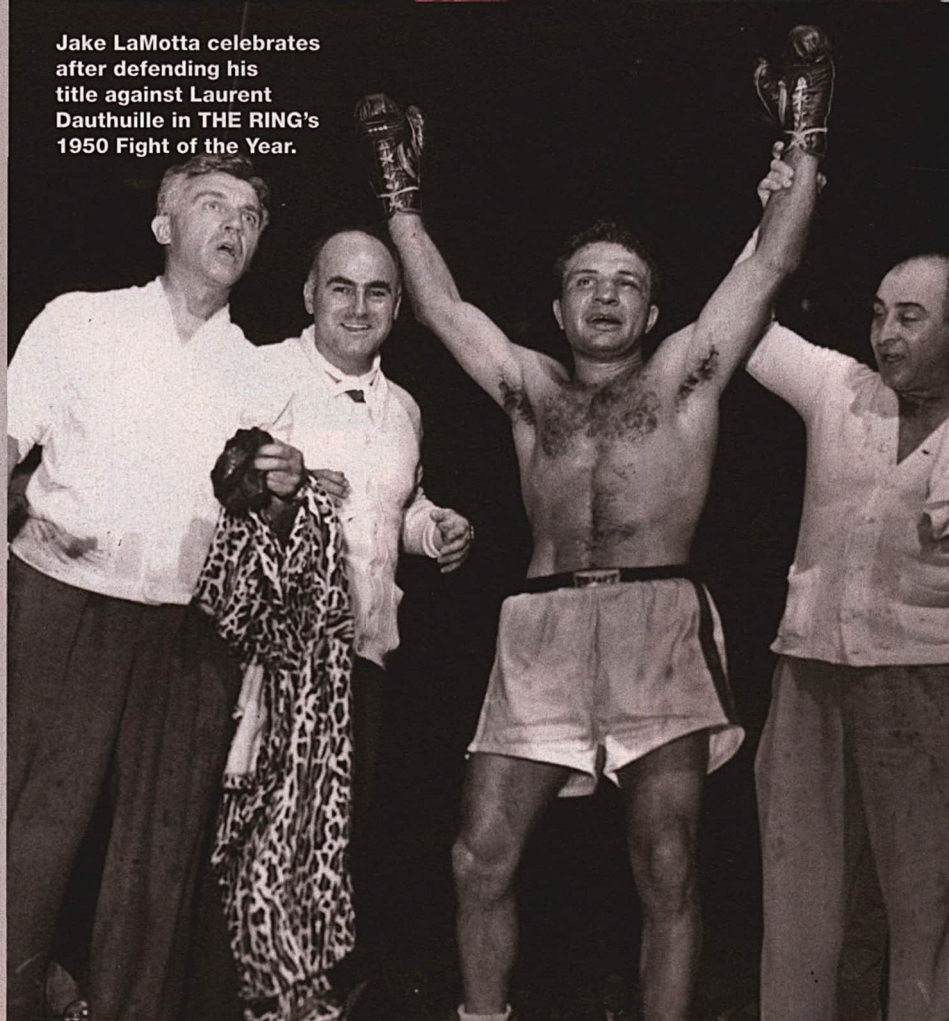
Rafael Garcia – Celebrated cutman and hand-wrapper for Floyd Mayweather Jr. who also worked the corners of Roberto Duran, Alexis Arguello, Wilfredo Gomez and Rafael Marquez.

Jozef Grudzien – Two-time Olympic medalist from Poland who won gold at the 1964 Games and silver at the 1968 Games (both at lightweight).

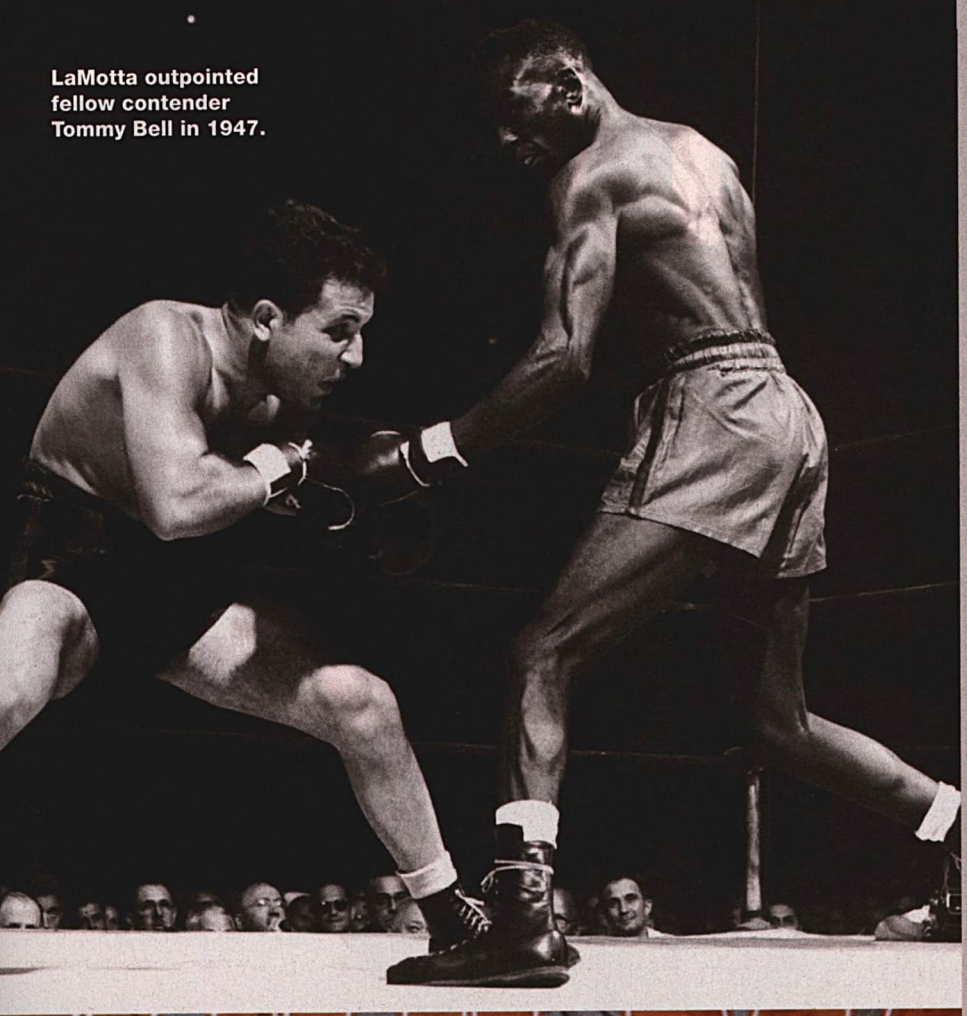
Doug Jones – Former light heavyweight and heavyweight



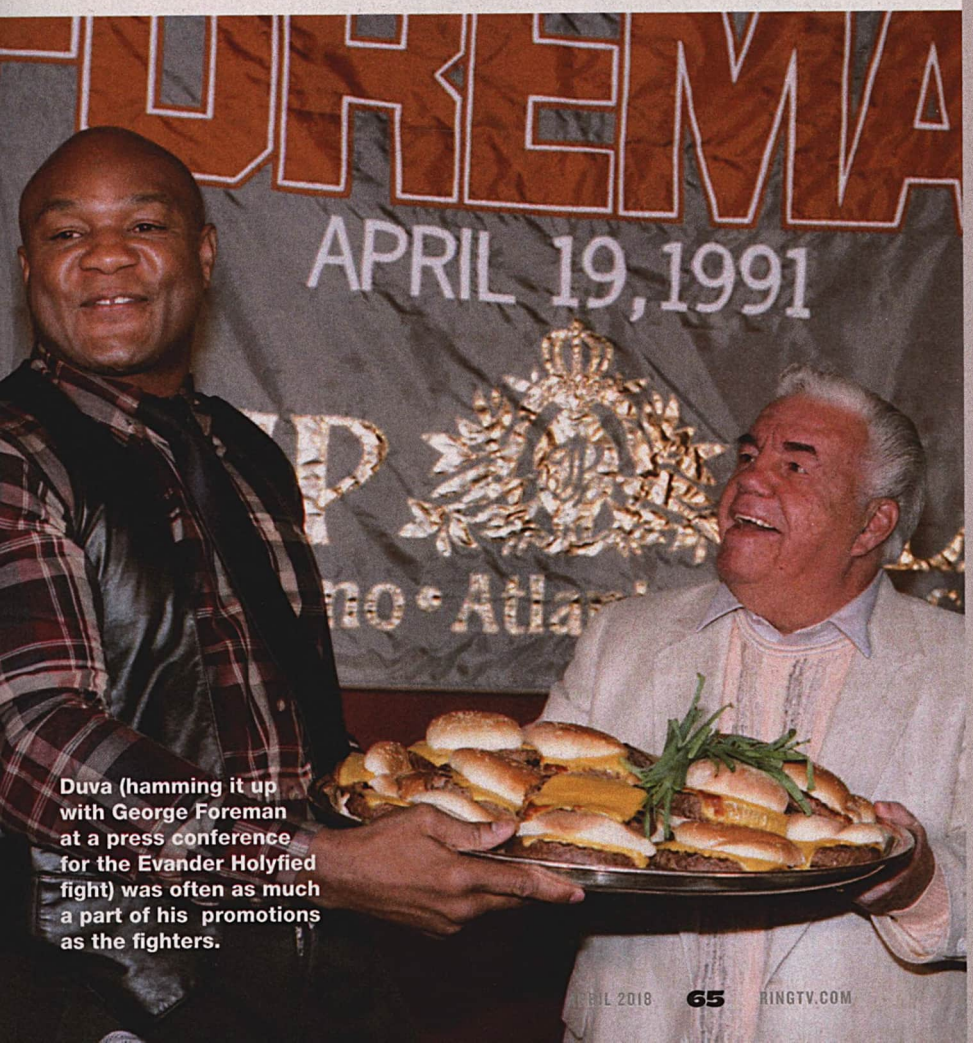
Lou Duva (here with Evander Holyfield) wasn't just a promoter; he was also a real "boxing guy" who worked in his fighters' corners.



Jake LaMotta celebrates after defending his title against Laurent Dauthuille in THE RING's 1950 Fight of the Year.



LaMotta outpointed fellow contender Tommy Bell in 1947.



Duva (hamming it up with George Foreman at a press conference for the Evander Holyfied fight) was often as much a part of his promotions as the fighters.

contender who engaged in THE RING's 1963 Fight of the Year against Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay at the time), fought heavyweight standouts Joe Frazier and Ernie Terrell (in a WBA title bout), and held KO victories over veteran Zora Foley and future 175-pound champ Bob Foster.

Eddie "The Animal" Lopez – Popular Los Angeles-area heavyweight who dropped an eight-round decision to Gerry Cooney in 1979 and held Leon Spinks to a 10-round draw in 1980.

Tony Madigan – Australian amateur boxer who represented his country in three Olympics (1952, 1956 and 1960, where he lost to Cassius Clay in the light heavyweight semifinals but took home a bronze medal from the Rome Games).

Dr. Ferdie Pacheco – Celebrated "Fight Doctor" was Muhammad Ali's personal physician, a cornerman for The Greatest and many of Angelo Dundee's other champions, who later had long and successful career as a TV boxing analyst.

Ultiminio (Sugar) Ramos – Former featherweight champ from Cuba who relocated to Mexico City, where he became a fan favorite. His championship reign (and legacy) was marred by the fight-related death of Davey Moore, whom he beat for the 126-pound title in 1963, but he defended the title in Mexico, Japan and Ghana before losing to Vicente Saldivar. He also twice challenged (unsuccessfully) Carlos Ortiz for the lightweight title. Ramos was inducted to the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2001.

David Sanchez – Former junior bantamweight contender from Mexico.

Rodrigo Valdez – Former middleweight champ from Colombia known for his two stern challenges to the legendary Carlos Monzon and for his heavy hands (THE RING rated him No. 29 in its 2003 collector's special, The 100 Greatest Punchers of All Time).

Marlon B. Wright – Prominent world-class referee born in Jamaica and based in Montreal, Canada, who boxed as an amateur and professional.

RETURN TO FORM

CELEBRATED FOR HIS POTENTIAL THEN DISMISSED AFTER SETBACKS, **JORGE LINARES** HAS COME BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

By **Steve Kim**

In order to appreciate what could be the biggest year of Jorge Linares' professional career – which will begin with a January 27 defense of his RING and WBA lightweight titles against Mercito Gesta – one must go back several years.

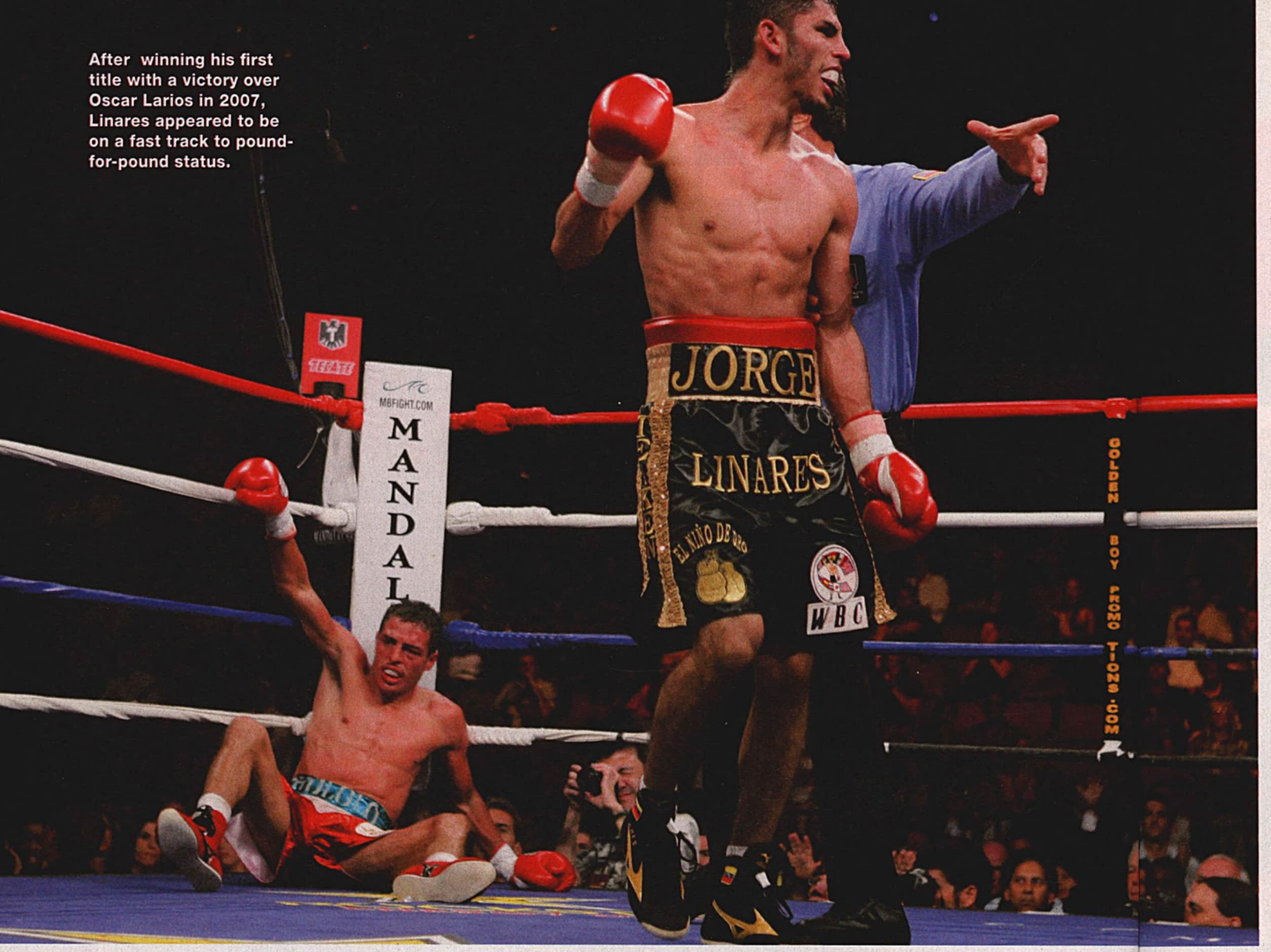
Linares' American debut – a 10th-round stoppage of veteran Oscar Larios for the vacant WBC featherweight title on the Bernard Hopkins-Winky Wright undercard in July 2007 – was so impressive that many diehard fans and boxing insiders, including HBO commentator Jim Lampley, who did the live call for the U.S. pay-per-view broadcast, believed they were witnessing the launch of a future Hall of Famer.

However, that fanfare was short-lived. Linares suffered his first loss with a first-round stoppage by Juan Carlos Salgado in October 2009, and when the once-celebrated stylist stumbled again a couple years later, it appeared that he had no future in boxing.

The rapid fall from grace began in October 2011 at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. Linares was putting on an artistic display against Antonio DeMarco over the first half of their scheduled 12-round bout for the vacant WBC lightweight title. However, as he built a lead into the late rounds, his HBO-televised performance quickly began to fall apart under the gritty underdog's pressure. Linares, who was a bloody mess as the fight was waved off by referee Raul Caiz Sr. in Round 11, was ahead on the cards by the scores of 99-91 and 98-92 (twice) when he lost.

A defeat had been snatched from the jaws of victory for the Venezuelan, and with the nature of the ending, Golden Boy Promotions scheduled a rematch for

Jorge Linares (pictured here with promoter Oscar De La Hoya after defeating Luke Campbell) defended his lightweight championship twice in 2017.



After winning his first title with a victory over Oscar Larios in 2007, Linares appeared to be on a fast track to pound-for-pound status.

the summer of the following year.

In the meantime, Linares would engage in a tune-up bout against the lightly regarded but heavy-handed Sergio Thompson in Mexico. But what was thought to be a way for Linares to regain his confidence and get back in the win column turned into a disaster as he was stopped in two rounds.

It was at that point that the obituaries for Linares' career were being written by some of the same pundits that predicted that he would one day be a pound-for-pound player.

Linares had hit rock bottom.

"After that fight I thought about everything, retiring possibly, but I spoke to the president of the WBA (Gilberto Mendoza Sr.), who has since passed away, and he encouraged me to fight and to continue to work hard, because he believed I had all the tools to become a world champion," Linares told THE RING through his manager, Jose De La Cruz.

It's often said that you learn much more in defeats than victories, and Linares said of these particular losses: "From the DeMarco fight it was really just a matter of experience and knowing that I could've done things a little different because I was ahead on all the cards. It was just me not having the experience I do now."

Back then, entering rough waters meant that Linares would sink, but those trials steeled him for the adversity that was to come his way.

"For example," he explained, "against Kevin Mitchell, I got knocked down and I got up and knocked him out. So, it was just more about experience and learning how to manage a fight when things aren't going too well."

The question at the time of the Thompson setback (Linares' third loss by KO) was whether Golden Boy would release him or not. While Linares had come into the sport with great expectations, he had failed to live up to them and he was coming off consecutive defeats. But Linares had a staunch advocate in matchmaker Robert Diaz, who was instrumental in bringing the Teiken Promotions-developed talent to Golden Boy.

"I was told at the time by the upper management that he was done and we should release him. I fought them off (that notion)," said Diaz. "I said, 'No, I don't think so.' I'm so proud of what he's done and what we've done together and where he's at today. It shows that a couple of losses is not the end of a career. I really see him as an example."

AP

Diaz began the process of rebuilding Linares from ground zero. At that point – in conjunction with the Tokyo-based Teiken (which co-promotes Linares) – bouts against the likes of Hector Velasquez, David Rodela, Berman Sanchez, Francisco Contreras, Nihito Arakawa and Ira Terry were booked.

"It's a process," Diaz explained about the solid-but-non-threatening opposition. "Obviously, when he lost to DeMarco and 'Yayo' (Thompson), for the next few fights he was very unsure of himself. You could see it in the ring. But fight after fight after fight, you could see the confidence coming back.

"The skills have always been there. Linares has always been a skillful fighter with a lot of speed and a lot of talent. It was just going back to the basics, and I think a lot of it had to do with him touching rock bottom and learning where he's at and not wanting to go back to that rock bottom."

It was a slow and steady process. Linares recalls the exact moment he was back.

"December 30, 2014, when I became a world champion again," he says of his fourth-round stoppage of Javier Prieto in Japan for the vacant WBC 135-pound belt. "I knew that I was back, but not quite, because I still hadn't showed that when I was down I could get back up and win (as he would against Mitchell in his first defense). But it was at that point I knew everything had changed as a fighter. I felt complete."

Since that point, Linares has stopped Mitchell (TKO 10) and Ivan Cano (TKO 4), then scored a pair of decisions over Anthony Crolla (for THE RING and WBA belts) in the U.K. before defeating difficult Olympic gold medalist Luke Campbell last September.

The 32-year-old veteran has clearly established himself as one of the premier lightweights in the world and one of the elite stylists in the sport. Now he wants to go big-game hunting and is searching for legacy-building fights. And there was talk at the end of 2017 of a showdown with Mikey Garcia (who held the WBC title that Linares vacated at the time).

"We talked with our matchmaker and Oscar (De La Hoya) and everyone, and we believed that we gave a fair offer to Mikey and we felt that it was getting there," De La Cruz told THE RING. "We felt that it was just a matter of him agreeing to the weight and everything, and then he changed his mind."

Garcia decided to face IBF junior welterweight beltholder Sergey Lipinets on February 10 in San Antonio, Texas. But he has stated that after this fight he would be willing to move back down to face Linares.

"Hopefully, he does (want the fight)," Linares said. "When we see it – a signed agreement – then we'll believe it. But the reality is that we might go up to 140 and fight him. Then what's going to be his excuse?"

The reality is that this matchup would still have to clear some major political hurdles in order to happen. But for curiosity's sake, how does Linares envision a fight with Garcia playing out?

"Mikey's a strong fighter. He comes forward and he wants fighters to come forward so he can counterpunch," Linares said. "But I don't believe he's faced a fighter like me. I'm fast, I have lateral movement, I have a lot more speed and I'm not just going to sit there for him to punch me. I believe it will be an interesting fight, a good fight, and if it happens it will be great for the sport."

The other intriguing challenge on the horizon is WBO 130-pound titleholder and THE RING's 2017 Fighter of the Year, Vasyl Lomachenko, the slashing Ukrainian southpaw who is boxing's Mikhail Baryshnikov. A Linares-Lomachenko fight would be a battle of two of the sport's most elegant fighters.

"Lomachenko is a great fighter with a lot of speed, a lot of lateral movement, but he doesn't have the reach that I have, he doesn't have the punch that I have," Linares said of that particular dream match. "We have more than just experience."

And part of the "experience" that Linares speaks of is having to come back from devastating losses. "We've been there – and I don't believe he's been (there) in the past.

"Also, my lateral movement with my speed will give him problems. I'm not just going to sit there and wait for him to throw a hundred punches and not get hit back."

Linares is aware of the promotional and network partnerships that could obstruct these dream matchups, but he remains hopeful, perhaps realizing that he's reaching the tail end of his athletic prime.

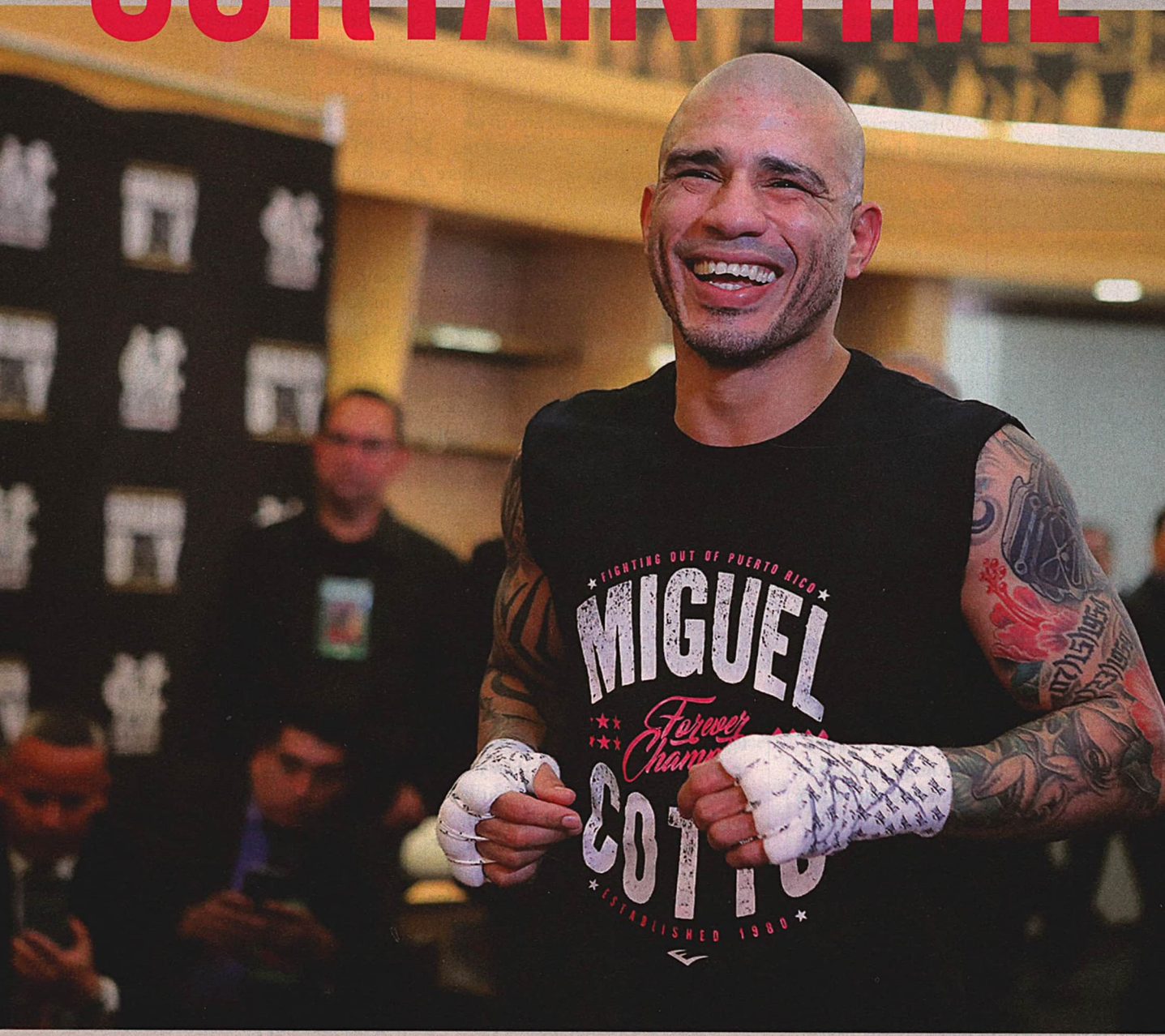
"I hope both of these fights, Garcia and Lomachenko, happen," Linares said. "It's good for the sport. At this stage of my career I only want the best, and for those two guys to fight me will be the best options.

"Obviously, there's a lot of upcoming young fighters also. If we move up to 140, there will be a lot more opportunities, but for now these are the two guys that are doing a lot of talking. And we are ready for anyone."

Fifteen years into the pro game (with 46 fights under his belt), Linares believes he has finally arrived.

"I definitely feel that I'm in my best moment and time as a fighter," he said. "The best is yet to come." RING

CURTAIN TIME



IN THE DRESSING ROOM WITH **MIGUEL COTTO** BEFORE HIS LAST FIGHT

By **Thomas Hauser**

On December 2, 2017, at 7:15 p.m., Miguel Cotto walked into a dressing room at Madison Square Garden preparatory to fighting for the last time.

Cotto had a lot on his mind. Nine weeks earlier, his Puerto Rican homeland had been devastated by a historic hurricane that shattered the island's infrastructure and killed as many as 1,000 people. And more relevant to the hours ahead, the 37-year-old fighter had pledged that this would be his final fight.

The dressing room was a large

oval enclosure that houses the New York Rangers on game nights. Locker stalls with a plaque bearing the name and uniform number of each player ringed the room. Rolls of tape lay scattered about, a reminder of the team's 5-to-1 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes the night before. Two large sliding doors on a credenza at the far end of the room also functioned as blackboards with a red-and-blue diagram of a hockey rink emblazoned against a white backdrop on each one. Several erasable marker pens lay on a shelf behind the doors.

Cotto was wearing black pants, a burgundy jacket over a white T-shirt, and blue track shoes. His mother, wife, two sons, one of his two daughters, trainer Freddie Roach, assistant trainer Marvin Somodio, cutman David Martinez, strength and conditioning coach Gavin MacMillan, and Bryan Perez (his closest friend) were with him.

Miguel checked his email, put on some music, and sat down on one of two brown leather sofas that had been placed on opposite sides of the room. Over the next 45 minutes, he texted, talked intermittently with Perez, and ate half of a large container of fruit salad. That left Roach with time to reflect on his six-fight tenure with Cotto.

"I'm glad Miguel is retiring on his terms," Freddie said. "That it's not some commission saying, 'You're all washed up, you're done.' I wish more fighters made decisions like that. I know I couldn't do it. I fought five times after I should have quit and lost four of them. The last fight I had was in Lowell, Massachusetts, which was my favorite place to fight. I embarrassed myself. I didn't even try to win. After that, I knew it was time."

In 2009, Roach trained Manny Pacquiao for his brutal demolition of Cotto. Did he feel badly about that, given his fondness for Miguel today?

"No," Freddie answered. "That was my job then. But I'm on Miguel's side now."

Roach paused.

"You know, Miguel and Manny are the two most talented fighters I've had. A trainer is lucky if one fighter like that comes his way in a lifetime. I've had two of them. But this is a must-win fight for Miguel. After everything he's accomplished, he doesn't want to go out on a loss."

At 8:00 p.m., Cotto left the dressing room and accompanied his family to their seats inside the main arena. After returning, he chatted with Golden Boy matchmaker Robert Diaz and Cotto Promotions vice president Hector Soto before leaving again, this time with New York State Athletic Commission inspector Joe Schaffer for his pre-fight physical examination, and to give a urine sample. He returned at 8:40, took off his pants, put on his boxing shoes, and handed his watch and necklace to Bryan Perez for safekeeping. Then he opened a sealed bottle of Fiji water he'd brought with him and began eating the rest of his fruit salad.

NYSAC inspector Ernie Morales informed him that was a problem. If Miguel ate anything more now, he'd have to provide another urine sample. And under NYSAC rules, he could only drink water provided by the promotion which, in this case, consisted of 24 bottles of Dasani on a table at the far end of the room.

"But I like Fiji," Miguel protested. "Water is water."

Morales held firm.

Robert Diaz dispatched someone from Golden Boy to buy 10 bottles of Fiji water for Cotto and 10 more for Sadam Ali (Miguel's opponent) so each camp would be treated equally.

Roach went down the hall to watch Ali's hands being wrapped.

Miguel turned his attention to a large television monitor and stretched while watching an early preliminary fight.

The 10 bottles of Fiji water arrived.

Andre Rozier (Ali's trainer) came into the room and watched as Somodio taped Miguel's hands. When the wrapping was done, Cotto lay down on the blue-carpeted floor and Marvin stretched him out. Then Miguel put on his protective cup and trunks, shadowboxed for a while, and circled the room offering a kind word and physical gesture to everyone there.

Oscar De La Hoya, Golden Boy president Eric Gomez, and director of publicity Ramiro Gonzalez came in to wish Miguel well. They were followed by referee Charlie Fitch, who gave Cotto his pre-fight instructions.

There was more shadowboxing.

Shortly after 10:00 p.m., Miguel went into an adjacent room with Perez and Soto for a brief prayer.

Somodio gloved him up.

More shadowboxing.

Cotto hit the pads with Roach for five minutes, took a minute off, and did it for five minutes more.

Another break ... More padwork.

Rey Vargas vs. Oscar Negrete (the co-featured fight of the evening) ended.

Miguel put on his robe, left the room, and walked to a boxing ring as an active professional fighter for the 47th and final time.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book – There Will Always Be Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.*

THE THIRD MAN
VALUE
CASA DE BOLSA
Corona

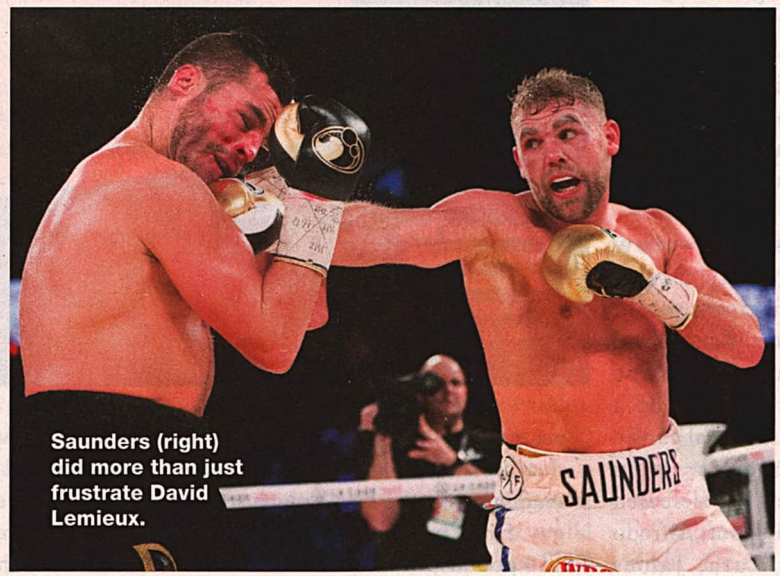
BILLY JOE SAUNDERS' MASTERFUL PERFORMANCE AGAINST DAVID LEMIEUX HAS PUT HIM IN THE CANELO-GGG CONVERSATION

By **Tom Gray**

After scoring with a sharp one-two in the fifth round, the defending champion moved swiftly off to his right. The frustrated challenger, looking for instant payback, released a killer right hand in retaliation, but the target suddenly disappeared. In an eyeblink, the champion had moved to his left and the go-home punch sailed harmlessly into the night.

An entire fight in a microcosm.

On December 16 at the Place Bell in Laval, Canada, WBO middleweight titleholder Billy Joe Saunders landed effectively while his hapless challenger, David Lemieux, missed and missed and missed. However, following this exchange in Round 5, the unbeaten Saunders raised his glove above his eyes and looked mockingly into the crowd to see where the bomb had landed.



Saunders (right) did more than just frustrate David Lemieux.

Lemieux, a former world titleholder and one of the five best middleweights in the world, was being humiliated. What many had viewed as a 50-50 fight coming in was nothing more than an exhibition. In one night, Saunders, from Hertfordshire, England, was transformed from middleweight beltholder to a serious threat to superstars Gennady Golovkin and Canelo Alvarez.

"We were away from home, and that's always at the back of your mind because you can't afford to let it be close," said Saunders, who was fighting outside of the U.K. for the first time in his professional career. "With me, the bigger the occasion, the better the opponent, the better I'll perform. If I'm fit and in shape, I'm the slickest middleweight in the world.

"They expected me to turn up, get beat and be happy at getting beat. Lemieux was supposed to take my title and fight Canelo. That's what was supposed to happen, but I destroyed that plan. The media (in North America) thought I'd turned up for the money, but that wasn't the case. I wasn't even rolling the dice with this fight, because I knew what I had inside me."

Saunders (26-0, 12 knockouts) outpointed Andy Lee to win the title in December 2015. Due to injury, lack of motivation and changes in his training team, it would be one year before the Englishman made his first title defense – and the performance was forgettable. Saunders' 12-round unanimous-decision victory over the unheralded Artur Akavov in Paisley, Scotland, was, in the fighter's own words, "shit."

Big changes were required, and last summer, Saunders finally settled on acclaimed coach Dominic Ingle from Sheffield, England. As well as churning out former IBF welterweight titleholder Kell Brook, the Ingle Gym, which was founded by Dominic's father, Brendan, famously produced former unified featherweight champion Prince Naseem Hamed. The Ingle style places solid emphasis on footwork and defensive prowess, and Saunders looked far sharper in outpointing American contender Willie Monroe Jr. in September.

"Over in Canada, I read an article which focused solely on the fight Billy had with Akavov," recalled Ingle. "It just ignored the fact that Billy had got himself in shape and beat Monroe in September. It ignored the fact that he'd come to me and made massive changes in terms of his preparation.

"The Monroe performance was never going to be vintage Billy Joe, because of the timeframe we had to get him in shape, but we were using that as a buildup to his next fight. I told Billy, 'All you have to do is beat (Monroe), shut him out a little bit. Don't try and impress.' Billy only had one week off and he was back in the gym. And look at the difference between the Monroe fight and the Lemieux fight."

So, can Saunders take his level of performance up another gear and seriously challenge Canelo or Golovkin for middleweight supremacy? One thing is for certain: Fans and experts are giving the 28-year-old lefty a considerably better chance than they were before he humiliated Lemieux.

The Lemieux-Saunders fight was aired live on HBO in the U.S. and the positive vibes from announcer Max Kellerman and multi-weight world champion Roy Jones Jr. were visceral. In the U.K., Barry Jones, a former WBO junior lightweight titleholder, provided commentary for BT Sport/BoxNation and was equally impressed.

"Billy has shown an audience in North America that he's not just a titleholder who was over to give one of their guys a belt," Jones said. "He's shown that he's for real and he's sold

himself. And make no mistake, if Billy had lost to Lemieux, he had nowhere to go. This was last chance saloon for him because he'd lost a lot of momentum in his career.

"On that performance, things have changed massively. Prior to the Lemieux fight, other than for financial gain, I would have kept Billy Joe away from Golovkin and Canelo. Now, you wouldn't fear putting Billy in there with either of them. He goes in with a realistic chance of winning or, at the very least, competing. That's the important part."

Jones, Ingle and Saunders gave their take on the strengths and weaknesses of the two best middleweights in the world today – and on how Saunders might fare against Canelo or Golovkin:

Saunders has never lacked bravado or exuberance going into a fight.

CANELO ALVAREZ

Record: 49-1-2 (34 KOs) • **Current titles:** THE RING middleweight and lineal championships

The biggest pay-per-view attraction in boxing today, Canelo Alvarez is a two-weight world champion and pound-for-pound entrant who has mixed with the very best. Over the course of a glittering 12-year professional career, the 27-year-old superstar from Guadalajara, Mexico, has defeated Shane Mosley, Austin Trout, Alfredo Angulo, Erislandy Lara, James Kirkland and Miguel Cotto.

Now, at the peak of his powers, Alvarez is coming off an entertaining 12-round split decision draw to Golovkin in September. The Mexican icon was sharp early, but he appeared to be outworked for several sessions before coming on late. Despite the result being controversial, Canelo's movement, durability and counterpunching skills were extremely impressive, and it will take a terrific fighter to beat him.

"Canelo's got a lot of experience," said Ingle with ample respect. "He's a solid all-rounder who throws his shots well, and his feet are always in a good place. But he was tripped up against Floyd Mayweather (a majority decision that should have been unanimous), who was a much smaller guy. Floyd probably walks around at 150 pounds, whereas Canelo is noted for blowing up in weight.

"Mayweather, despite being the older man, just completely outclassed Canelo. He did a similar thing to what Billy just did to Lemieux. Canelo wanted to have a fight and Mayweather played chess with him. There's not many fighters who can do that under pressure, but Floyd did it perfectly. Billy, despite not being a big puncher, can do that too."

Jones covered the Mayweather-Canelo fight, which took place at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in September 2013, from ringside. He disagrees with Ingle's comparison, largely because the gulf in experience between the fighters was so vast at that time. Mayweather was having his 24th world title bout and Alvarez was having his eighth, a factor Jones feels may have contributed to the one-sided nature of the contest.

"I don't think you can look at the Mayweather fight as a blueprint on how to beat Canelo, because nobody else boxes like Mayweather," said Jones after some deliberation. "And you also have to factor in that Canelo is a different animal to the 22-year-old kid who fought Floyd all those years ago.

"Canelo showed in his fight with Golovkin how good he is technically. He's not just a guy with a big punch. He can slip shots and he can move around the ring very well. The southpaw stance helps Billy but, again, Canelo has been in with Lara (left-hander) and he would have learned from that fight. All these so-

called bad performances have made Canelo the fighter he is today."

Since the Mayweather setback, Alvarez has gone undefeated for four years, claiming a title at junior middleweight and another (plus a RING championship) at middleweight. In battles against Cotto and Golovkin, his defensive prowess was clear to see and the Mexico star is now a cerebral boxer-fighter with excellent variety, speed and timing.

Saunders would enter the ring with advantages in height, reach and natural size. But would that be enough to overcome Alvarez's talent and huge edge in big fight experience? The Englishman would also be fighting away from home, probably in Las Vegas, although that didn't faze him in the slightest against Lemieux.

"Canelo is strong, he's fast and he's always in good shape," acknowledged Saunders. "But I wouldn't have to change too much from what I did against Lemieux to beat him. I'd let more shots go and I'd need to be a little bit cleaner. I would bring maybe 70 percent of my game plan from the Lemieux fight and the other 30 percent would be geared specifically to deal with Canelo.

"Even though he's younger than Golovkin, he has some miles on the clock now. He's had a lot of big fights and I don't know how much that will have taken out of him. In his last couple of fights, I personally thought he'd dipped a bit. Liam Smith had some success at stages and I thought to myself, 'Well, he didn't look too good there.' To be honest, though, a lot depends on who turns up on the night."

GENNADY GOLOVKIN

Record: 37-0-1 (33 KOs) • Current titles: IBF, WBA and WBC middleweight

There is real irony in Gennady Golovkin reaching the top of the mythical pound-for-pound rankings at this point in his career. Two or three years ago, most fans and experts felt the middleweight titleholder was impossible to conquer. Virtually nobody would have given Alvarez or Danniel Jacobs a shot at defeating him. In 2017, however, both of those fighters pushed Golovkin hard and that aura of invincibility is slowly disappearing.

But make no mistake, GGG has gotten to this point on merit. Having captured a fringe WBA title seven years ago, the 2004 Olympic silver medalist would eventually unify three belts at 160 pounds and conclude a streak of 23 consecutive knockouts. Golovkin's almost supernatural punching power struck fear into the heart of the middleweight division the same way Mike Tyson's did in the late 1980s.

"I thought Golovkin was on the slide after he fought Jacobs," said Ingle, who worked against the Kazakhstani powerhouse when Kell Brook was bludgeoned to a fifth-round stoppage in September 2016. "Jacobs is very tricky, but Billy is a better fighter in my opinion. Being a southpaw will also present a unique set of problems. Billy is improving. There was massive improvement from Monroe to Lemieux, and there will be further improvement from Lemieux to the next fight.

"Billy is a proper middleweight. He's 5-foot-11, he's a got a wide back and he's thick-set. But the thing is, he's got fast feet and fast hands. People think that Golovkin will just walk him down and put it on him, but Billy has the ring craft to box and move for 12 rounds. Golovkin has got patience, but the difficult thing for him will be pinning Billy down to land shots in the first place."

Saunders acknowledged Golovkin's qualities in terms of cutting the ring off and his punching power, but the WBO titleholder is confident that he can outmaneuver the 35-year-old veteran. The precocious Englishman was also keen to put that incredible knockout streak in perspective.

"When (Golovkin) was knocking everyone out, they weren't A-class fighters," said Saunders, as though stating the obvious. "They were just under B-class and he was taking them all out easy – body shots, head shots. Those guys were European-level fighters and not one of them was a world champion, except Lemieux (who was the IBF titleholder in October 2015).

"I'll have my game plan. Early on against Golovkin, I would hold my feet a little more than I did against Lemieux and bring out the ace card (movement and angles) in the second half. I'm not saying I would stand and trade with him, but I would hold my feet a bit more because I have much faster hands than him. If I can get threes and fours off before he can get one off, then why not?"

Jones, without prompting, said the same thing. While movement and angles would be a vital part of the game plan, Saunders would find time to let his hands go against Golovkin and his superior speed could help him build a substantial lead on the scorecards.

"Billy can't afford to load up, but he can flurry," said Jones. "I wouldn't throw more than four shots at a time, though. As we seen with the Canelo fight, you can get off in combinations. The problem with Golovkin is he gives you no space and cuts the ring off so quickly. Normally, Billy can hit hard enough to keep middleweights honest, but Golovkin will try and walk straight through him.

"Golovkin's front foot controls a fight. He tells you where to go and makes you punch when you don't want to. When you punch against your own will, it empties your tank. Normally, when you get set to throw a combination, you (Jones inhales), then you explode. When you're forced to throw, you're going against your own engine. It's all down to dictating the pace."

Saunders was dazzling against Lemieux, but time will tell if that sophisticated skillset will work against the elite players at 160 pounds.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for THE RING. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

Naoya Inoue is known for the power in his left hand, but his right is also pretty good at distorting faces (as Yoann Boyeaux can attest).

Former flyweight champion Toshiyuki Igarashi grabs a quiet moment before his attempt to regain a world title against Sho Kimura ...

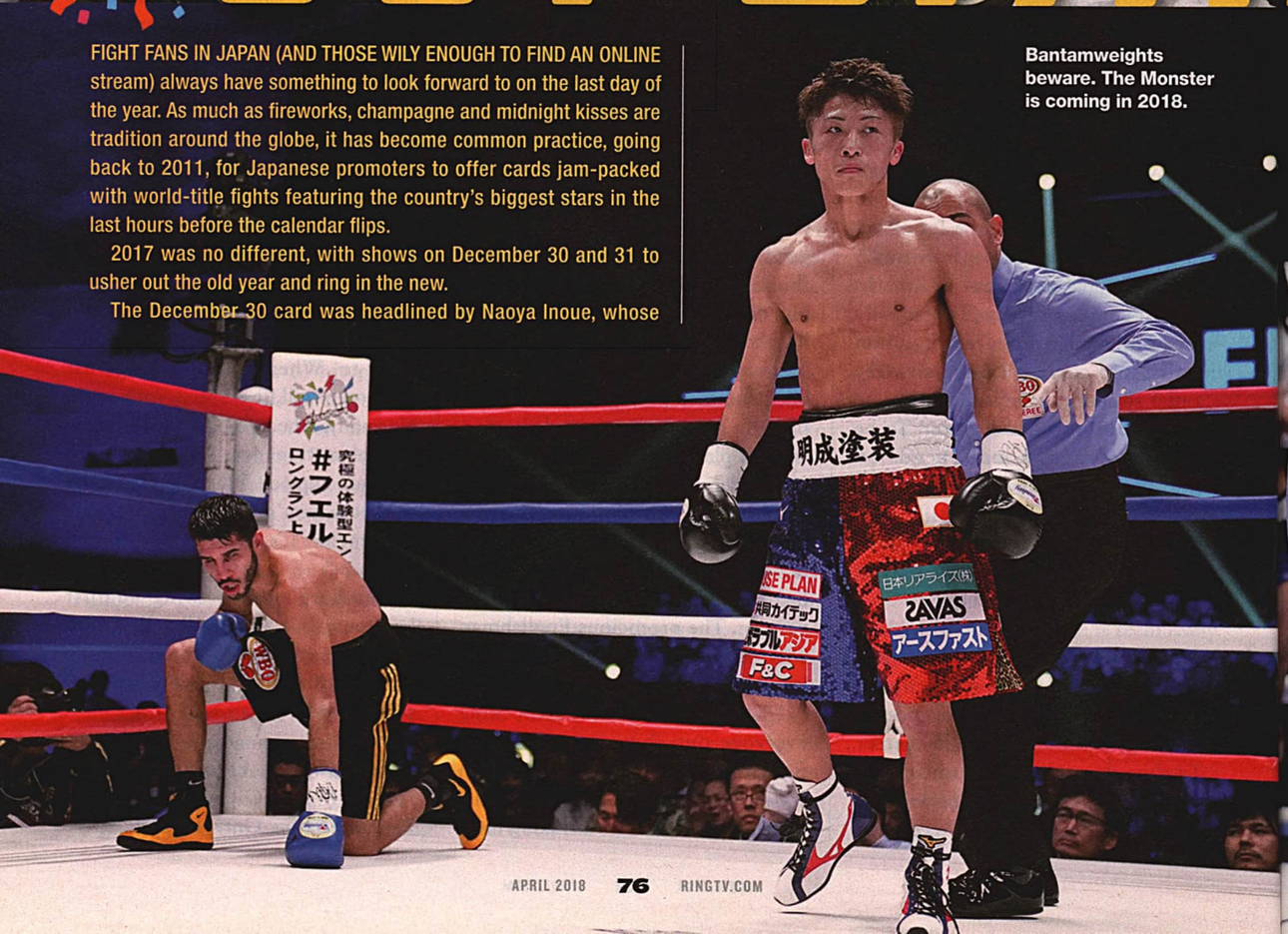
OUT WITH A BANG

FIGHT FANS IN JAPAN (AND THOSE WILY ENOUGH TO FIND AN ONLINE stream) always have something to look forward to on the last day of the year. As much as fireworks, champagne and midnight kisses are tradition around the globe, it has become common practice, going back to 2011, for Japanese promoters to offer cards jam-packed with world-title fights featuring the country's biggest stars in the last hours before the calendar flips.

2017 was no different, with shows on December 30 and 31 to usher out the old year and ring in the new.

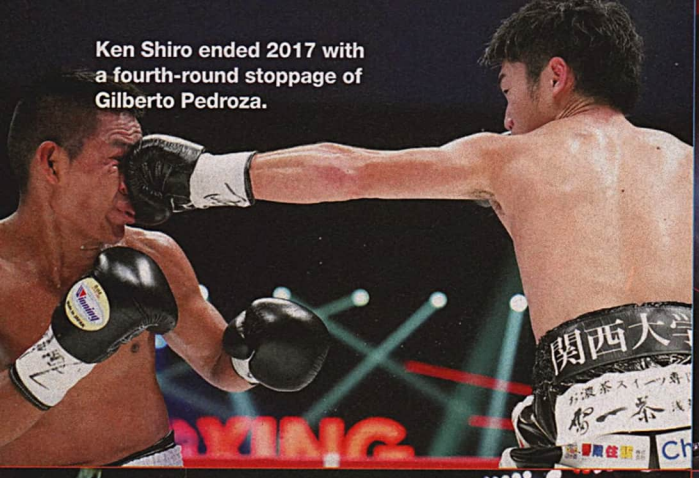
The December 30 card was headlined by Naoya Inoue, whose rapid ascent to the pound-for-pound list is rivaled only by Vasyl Lomachenko, as well as young junior flyweight titleholder Ken Shiro. New Year's Eve had more in the way of competition, with a pair of fights featuring titleholders Hiroto Kyoguchi and Sho Kimura. To top it off was a unification matchup between Ryoichi Taguchi and Milan Melindo which also, since it featured the No. 1 and No. 2 junior flyweights, was for the vacant RING championship.

Since you probably had plans and weren't able to make it yourself, photographer Naoki Fukuda was in the trenches at both shows and brought back these last images of 2017 to grace our pages.



Bantamweights beware. The Monster is coming in 2018.

... but it would be Kimura who prevailed with a ninth-round TKO to retain his belt.



Ken Shiro ended 2017 with a fourth-round stoppage of Gilberto Pedroza.

Shiro felt the love in the arena on his way to the ring .

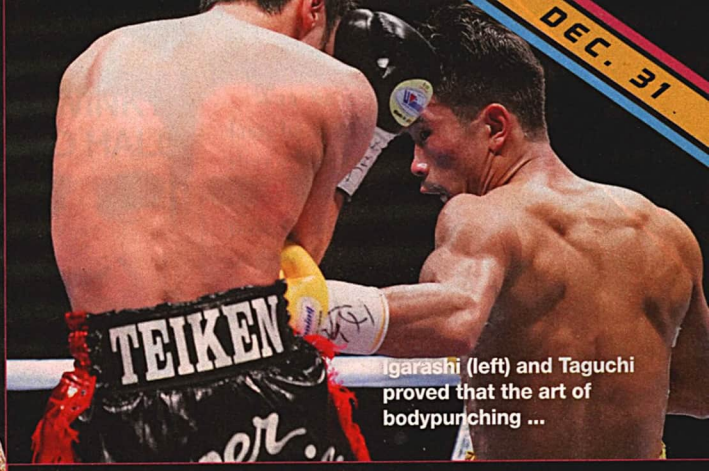
Despite the fanfare (and the drum solo), Inoue kept his game face on.

Pedroza also got into the spirit.

Shiro wasn't the only one with a killer straight left.

DEC. 30

Blood and guts were on display ...

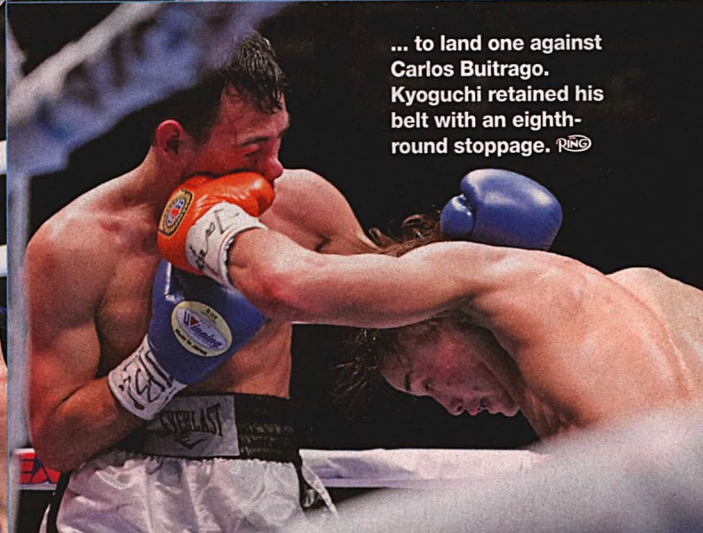


Igarashi (left) and Taguchi proved that the art of bodypunching ...

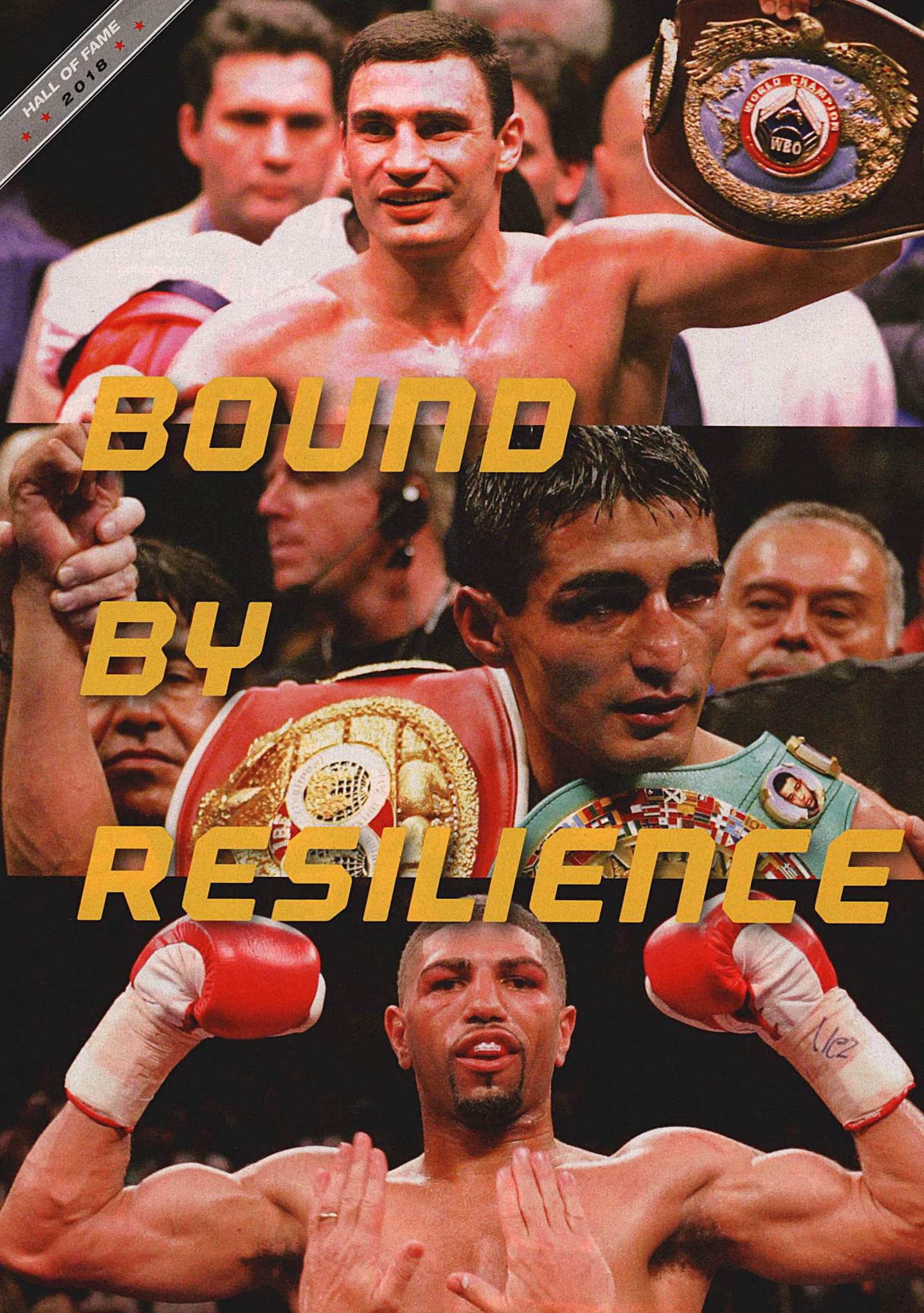
... is alive and well in Japan.

... for 12 rounds during the Taguchi-Melindo fight, won by Taguchi

Kyoguchi was willing to take one ...



... to land one against Carlos Buitrago. Kyoguchi retained his belt with an eighth-round stoppage. RING


HALL OF FAME
2018
WORLD CHAMPION
WBO
BOUND
BY
RESILIENCE

VITALI KLITSCHKO, ERIK MORALES AND WINKY WRIGHT ALL DEFIED THE ODDS TO BUILD HALL OF FAME CAREERS

By **Lee Groves**

When the International Boxing Hall of Fame announced its Modern Class of 2018 – Vitali Klitschko, Erik Morales and Ronald Wright – the three fighters were instantly united by shared accomplishment. But if one looks deeper, they also should be bound by a common career-defining trait: resilience.

To reach this post-career pinnacle, each conquered contrasting adversities. Klitschko overcame chronic injury and nearly four years of inactivity to assemble one of history's most remarkable comebacks. Morales was forced to dig deep during the heat of battle, and while he didn't always win, he succeeded more often than he failed. No matter the result, Morales remained true to the Mexican warrior heritage forged by countrymen Ruben Olivares, Julio Cesar Chavez, Carlos Zarate, Lupe Pintor and Pipino Cuevas, all of whom preceded Morales into the Hall. Meanwhile, Wright toiled in obscurity for years because he embodied the "high risk, low reward" curse. But once he got his opportunity to shine on the biggest stage, he did so with blinding brilliance and proved he had the tools to defeat his more celebrated peers.

This year's voting was the stage on which they produced one final display of competitiveness. The field of first-time eligibles was so deep that five new names were added to the ballot instead of the usual three. When the voters examined their resumes, those belonging to "Dr. Ironfist," "El Terrible" and "Winky" created a strong enough psychic dent in enough voters' minds to lift them to the summit while forcing lower-weight great Ivan Calderon and popular British bruiser Ricky Hatton to wait until next year. The tales that led to this trio's day of destiny should help explain why those dents were decisive.

★★★

Had Klitschko remained retired after vacating his WBC heavyweight title in November 2005, he never would've been seriously considered for enshrinement. Yes, he would've had a nice career – a two-time titlist and onetime RING champion with a record of 35-2 (34 knockouts), which, at the time, boasted the highest knockout percentage in division history – but most historians would have wondered what might have been had this 6-foot-7 250-pounder not been so incongruously brittle. A thigh injury twice postponed his defense against mandatory challenger (and ex-titleholder) Hasim Rahman, after which a torn meniscus forced him not only to cancel the fight, but to quit the sport. It would've been a bitter but fitting end, for Klitschko likely would've been remembered more for his injury-marred losses to Chris Byrd (torn rotator cuff) and Lennox Lewis (ghastly gashes that required 60 stitches) than any of his victories. Worse yet, Vitali would have been fated to play second fiddle to younger sibling Wladimir, who, in terms of combined time, owned a heavyweight title longer than anyone else in history.

Though most thought he was finished, Klitschko knew different. While his old belt was passed from Rahman to Oleg Maskaev to Samuel Peter, Klitschko rested and recuperated. But the long road back was hardly smooth. He signed to fight Jameel McCline in September 2007, but a back injury forced him to withdraw. Once again, all seemed lost.

Nine months later, Klitschko cashed in his "WBC champion emeritus" card by signing a contract to fight Peter in October 2008. The ex-champ certainly looked ready – at 247 he was actually three pounds lighter than he was against Danny Williams in 2004 – but at 37 was he in *fighting* shape?

Was he ever. From first bell to last, he was dominant – so much so that it looked as if he'd never been away. Every tool that defined his past success was in perfect working order. His thumping jabs sliced through Peter's guard and thoroughly controlled distance. His underrated handspeed and mobility bedazzled the lead-footed champion. His smashing hooks and crosses wore Peter down physically and tormented him mentally. Peter's will to fight was broken when he learned, through open scoring, that he was down 80-72 on two cards and 79-73 on the third. Rather than fight on and hope for a one-punch miracle, Peter opted to remain on the stool and surrender his title.

With that act, Klitschko became a three-time titlist while also achieving the long-held dream of reigning alongside IBF/WBO titlist Wladimir. Their "Twin Towers" rule – solidified after Wladimir won the RING belt in 2009 and added David Haye's WBA strap in 2011 – continued for the next four years, and it was here that Vitali secured enshrinement. He registered nine successful defenses, six by knockout, and the fighters he turned back had a combined record of 286-11-3 – a 96 percent win percentage. Even more amazingly, he barely lost a round, even at age 41 when, in his final fight, he stopped the 21-0 Manuel Charr in four.

Klitschko's return rates alongside those produced by Eder Jofre, who went 25-0 and won the featherweight title at 37; by Sugar Ray Leonard, who dethroned middleweight champion and pound-for-pound king Marvelous Marvin Hagler in his first fight in nearly three years; and by George Foreman, who improbably regained the heavyweight title almost exactly 20 years after losing it to Muhammad Ali. Because of that, Klitschko will take his rightful place alongside these immortals June 10.

★★★

Standing 5-foot-8 and owning a 72-inch reach, Morales was built to be a stick-and-move boxer. But once

the bell sounded, "El Terrible" showed everyone he had a slugger's soul and a wild boar's combativeness.

Born in Tijuana's Zona Norte section, Morales dabbled with basketball and soccer before discovering, at age 5, that boxing was his passion. That shouldn't have been surprising, since his father, Jose, was an ex-boxer who owned a gym. Following a nine-year amateur career that saw him go 108-6 and capture 11 national titles, Morales turned pro at 16 and showcased his dynamite power by scoring 12 knockouts in his first 14 bouts, all within three rounds.

Morales' first taste of the big time occurred when he defended his NABF junior lightweight title against ex-122-pound titlist Hector Acero Sanchez on the undercard of Oscar De La Hoya-Julio Cesar Chavez I. The savvy Dominican tried to rattle the 19-year-old with his in-and-out movement and sudden strikes, but the youngster showed precocious poise in winning a lopsided decision. Four fights later, the 21-year-old Morales challenged 39-year-old WBC junior featherweight king Daniel Zaragoza, whose late-career heroics against Sanchez, Joichiro Tatsuyoshi and Wayne McCullough lifted him to cult-hero status. The old professor threw everything at Morales through 10 riveting rounds, but the student absorbed the lessons with aplomb while imparting a few of his own. Entering the 11th, the result remained in the balance as Morales narrowly led on two cards (96-93, 95-94) while Zaragoza was prevailing on the third (95-94). All doubts were erased after Morales landed a straight right to the stomach that floored the grand old man. As Zaragoza struggled to regain his breath, he smiled, lifted his left glove and shook it approvingly at Morales as if to say, "OK, kid, you've passed the test." He regained his feet only after the 10-count was completed.

Over the next 2½ years, Morales defended his belt nine times, the first seven of which ended inside the distance. His victims included ex-titleholders Jose Luis Bueno, Junior Jones and McCullough, and his reign reached a crescendo when he met WBO counterpart Marco Antonio Barrera in February 2000.

Theirs was a rivalry based on shared goals and social contrasts. Morales was the working-class Zona Norte kid while Barrera had been born into a wealthy Mexico City family and, as a teenager, had aspired to become a lawyer. Their mutual distaste resulted in a savage streetfight that produced THE RING's Round of the Year (the fifth) as well as its Fight of the Year. Despite suffering a flash knockdown in the final round, Morales was declared the split-decision winner.

That controversial result was the fuse that ignited a celebrated trilogy. Barrera won the next two fights, the first by an arguable unanimous decision in June 2002 to win Morales' WBC featherweight belt and the second by a thrilling but deserved majority decision in November 2004 to lift Morales' WBC junior lightweight strap. Fittingly, the latter bout was deemed THE RING's 2004 Fight of the Year.

Morales also will be remembered for another three-fight series against Manny Pacquiao, who vaulted onto the world stage by stopping Barrera. Less than four months after losing the third Barrera fight, Morales' exquisite skill and timing won him the first Pacquiao fight by a narrow unanimous decision. Pacquiao rebounded with two dynamic knockout victories to take the series.

Morales had also lost a decision to Zahir Raheem while out of shape between the first and second Pacquiao fights, and he followed the trilogy with a decision loss to then-WBC lightweight titleholder David Diaz. That led to Morales announcing his retirement. But "El Terrible" had one more run in him. After winning three straight, he showed extraordinary grit by battling a prime Marcos Maidana to a majority decision despite a horribly swollen eye, then stopping Pablo Cesar Cano in 10 to win the vacant WBC junior welterweight belt. The Cano victory enabled Morales to become the first Mexican to win major titles in four weight classes.

His nickname may be "Terrible," but as a fighter he was anything but.

All three inductees were skilled practitioners of the sweet science, but none shied from the savage side of the sport.

★★★

Joe Frazier once told a young Marvin Hagler, "You have three strikes against you: You're black, you're a southpaw and you're good." Frazier could have said the same to Wright because, like Hagler, he was a natural right-hander who fought as a lefty and he got his victories by dissecting his opponents. The

THE CLASS OF 2018

Vital stats and career highlights for this year's trio of inductees

Name: VITALI KLITSCHKO
Career: 1996-2012
Record: 45-2 (41 KOs)
Major titles: WBO heavyweight (1999-2000), RING heavyweight (2004), WBC heavyweight (2004-2005, 2008-2013)
Record in title fights: 15-2 (12 KOs)
Most significant fights: KO 2 Herbie Hide, L TKO 9 Chris Byrd, L TKO 6 Lennox Lewis, KO 8 Corrie Sanders, KO 8 Samuel Peter, KO 10 Chris Arreola, W 12 Shannon Briggs, KO 10 Tomasz Adamek, W 12 Dereck Chisora

Name: ERIK MORALES
Career: 1993-2012
Record: 52-9 (36 KOs)
Major titles: WBC junior featherweight (1997-2000), WBO junior featherweight title (2000), WBC featherweight (2001-2002, 2002-2003), WBC junior lightweight (2004), IBF junior lightweight (2004), WBC junior welterweight (2011-2012)
Record in title fights: 18-5 (11 KOs)
Most significant fights: KO 11 Daniel Zaragoza, KO 4 Junior Jones, W 12 Wayne McCullough, W 12 Marco Antonio Barrera I, KO 7 Kevin Kelley, W 12 Guty Espadas I, L 12 Marco Antonio Barrera II, W 12 Jesus Chavez, L 12 Marco Antonio Barrera III, W 12 Manny Pacquiao I, L KO 10 Manny Pacquiao II, L KO 3 Manny Pacquiao III, L 12 Marcos Maidana, KO 10 Pablo Cesar Cano

Name: WINKY WRIGHT
Career: 1990-2012
Record: 51-6-1 (25 KOs)
Major titles: WBO junior middleweight (1996-1998), IBF junior middleweight (2001-2004), RING/WBA/WBC junior middleweight (2004)
Record in title fights: 11-4-1 (3 KOs)
Most significant fights: L 12 Julio Cesar Vazquez, W 12 Bronco McKart I, L 12 Harry Simon, L 12 Fernando Vargas, W 12 Robert Frazier, W 12 Shane Mosley I, W 12 Shane Mosley II, W 12 Felix Trinidad, D 12 Jermain Taylor, W 12 Ike Quartey, L 12 Bernard Hopkins

difference between Hagler and Wright was killer instinct; Hagler's motto was "destruct and destroy" while Wright was perfectly satisfied with the "W."

That mindset, along with his laid-back personality, worked against him in a world where flash and highlight-reel knockouts paved the road to riches. Although he was an excellent amateur (he went 52-4 and turned pro shortly after winning gold at the 1990 U.S. Olympic Festival), Wright initially didn't see himself going to the next level.

"I was going to finish high school and find work somewhere," Wright told FloridaTrend.com writer Art Levy in December 2017. "But when I was 18, a promoter came to me and said, 'Do you want to turn pro?' I'm like, 'You're going to pay me to fight? Hell yeah!'"

But the big paydays he dreamt about proved elusive. After beginning his career 25-0, he lost his first title shot against WBA junior middleweight titlist Julio Cesar Vazquez, who entered the bout with a 50-1 record. It took Wright nearly two years and 10 more fights to earn a second crack, and this time he won a split decision over Bronco McKart to annex the WBO title. But while he achieved his objective, the trappings weren't ideal. He thrice defended against England-based challengers in England, then dropped the belt by majority decision to Namibian Harry Simon in South Africa. The situation got no better for Wright two fights later against IBF titlist Fernando Vargas. A weight-weakened Vargas struggled throughout the HBO-televised bout and many thought Wright had edged out a win. Instead, he lost a majority decision.

Following points wins over ex-titleholder McKart and future titlist Keith Mullings, Wright won Vargas' vacated IBF strap by outpointing Robert Frazier in October 2001. The atmospherics of this reign were much kinder, for Wright's first defense was staged in Miami (close to his adopted hometown of St. Petersburg) and he stopped Jason Papillion on the HBO-televised show topped by Roy Jones-Glen Kelly. The experience only stoked Wright's desire to fight on the biggest stages, but though he continued to beat the likes of McKart, J.C. Candelo and Angel Hernandez, that prospect seemed to be a pipe dream.

Until Shane Mosley came calling.

Fresh off his rematch win over De La Hoya to win the RING, WBA and WBC 154-pound belts, "Sugar Shane" sought a further unification. Mosley's plan was to beat Wright and set up a $10 million showdown with Felix Trinidad. Instead, Wright began the three-fight stretch that probably vaulted him into the Hall of Fame.

Fight one was Wright's wide decision win over Mosley. Fight two was Wright's more competitive majority-decision win in the rematch. And fight three was a stunningly dominant unanimous decision over Trinidad. Given "Tito's" electric comeback TKO over Ricardo Mayorga, few anticipated the degree of Wright's command in terms of the scorecards (120-107, 119-108 twice) and the stats (262-58 punches overall, 185-15 jabs and 77-43 powershots, as well as a 46-19 percent gap in power accuracy).

A weight-weakened Wright barely beat Aussie whirlwind Sam Soliman nearly seven months later, but the points win still earned him a crack at lineal middleweight champion Jermain Taylor. The nip-and-tuck affair was more action-packed than anticipated, but while the fight was satisfying, the draw that allowed Taylor to keep his crown was not.

Wright produced one last bit of wizardry when he outpointed former welterweight titlist Ike Quartey over 12 rounds in December 2006, but he ended his career with three decision losses to Bernard Hopkins, Paul Williams and Peter Quillin that were spread out over five years.

Wright may have six losses on his official record, but a strong case could be made that he wasn't decisively defeated from the Vazquez fight in August 1994 to the Hopkins bout in July 2007. In short, when Wright was on his game, few played that game better.

ACROSS THE POND

By Gareth A Davies

He's not back in fighting shape yet, but Tyson Fury is ready to get back in the ring.

RETURN OF THE KING

AFTER TWO YEARS ABSENT, HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION TYSON FURY AIMS TO RECLAIM THE SPOTLIGHT FROM 'AJ'

Tyson Fury, the self-styled "Gypsy King," was back by mid-December – heavier than the 29-year-old would like to be, but happy and motivated again. Having resolved his case with U.K. Anti-Doping on December 12 with both parties agreeing to backdate his two-year absence as a suspension, the man who dethroned Wladimir Klitschko on a memorable night in Dusseldorf in November 2015 was free to become a prizefighter once more.

Your "Across The Pond" correspondent was scheduled to be live on stage with Fury just 24 hours later at a dinner show with the fighter as the guest of honor, and the former WBO, IBF and WBA heavyweight titleholder opened up to me, expressing his gratitude that THE RING Magazine had stuck by him and had not stripped him of a belt he genuinely holds dear amongst his many baubles. It had kept a light on inside him during hard times, he said.

"I have to say that during some low and dark days, the RING Magazine belt was something I really cherished. I will always be grateful for that, and I will defend it with honor and pride in 2018," Fury told me as we chatted in the green room before going on stage in Wolverhampton.

And Fury had needed some cheering up, he revealed, during his depression "when life itself seemed pointless." He had ballooned to 27 stone (378 pounds) in weight, and it was letters from around the world from others suffering from mental health issues that had eventually "inspired and lifted" him. But in terms of professional fighting, Fury's goal is now to reclaim the belts he was stripped of and vacated, and believes he will have regained his physical and mental peak at some point next year to take on Anthony Joshua in what he called "the biggest fight ever seen in Britain."

He escaped a career-threatening drugs ban by accepting the retroactive suspension, the result of testing positive for nandrolone – he claimed eating non-castrated boar was to blame – and later refusing to take a random drug test while suffering depression. "I'm inspired to get back," explained this huge man, still undefeated after 25 fights and, up close, clearly having shed considerable weight already.

"I always thought the truth would come out and that I'd be able to fight again. It was devastating mentally over the last couple of years, but you live and learn. I felt like I'd reached my Everest when I beat Wladimir Klitschko to claim the world title, but now I'm motivated again. There are a lot of naysayers out there, and they don't believe I can beat practically anybody in the heavyweight division."

The prospect of Fury fighting Joshua next year is truly mouthwatering. Can Joshua land on the 6-foot-9 boxer? Will Fury still have what he displayed against Klitschko? The debate will roar long and loud and, in truth, there isn't a stadium in the U.K. big enough to host it. With 90,000 at Wembley Stadium, it would most likely break all pay-per-view records.

Fury wants "a couple of warm-up fights" and says he won't fight until he's "match-fit and sharp." But by late summer, as long as Joshua has not lost, this will be a huge contest pitting a media darling against a self-styled bad boy. The setup couldn't be better, and Fury has already fallen into his role as the master salesman of the big fight. "Joshua has been a good little polisher boy, polishing up my belts," he said with a twinkle. "Joshua is a big, strong lad – good power, good physique – but what else can I say? There are levels to this game, and my boxing ability is way more advanced than his is.

"The belts? They don't mean anything really ... I was the man who beat the man who beat the man when I dethroned Klitschko. ... What will they say when the big, fat Gypsy King gets in there and makes this Adonis Joshua look like a child in the ring? They'll say he fought me too soon, that he was inexperienced, that he slipped ... but you'll see it sometime sooner or later."

Let's hope so, but also remember what he has come back from.

"They say everything happens for a reason," Fury told me, adding that others asking for his help had made him realize that depression is not one man's burden. "Someone labeled it 'the four kings' right now – four

undefeated heavyweight fighters in myself, Joshua, (Joseph) Parker and (Deontay) Wilder. But I labeled it 'three peasants and a king.' There's only one king of the division and that's me."

However you label it, with Fury back you have to admit that the heavyweight division just got a whole lot more interesting.

AMATEUR CHAMPION FACES DEPORTATION

Kelvin Bilal Fawaz, a former amateur national champion who boxed for England, was snatched from his gym in Harlesden by undercover cops in late November and was being held in a detention center under the threat of deportation by the Home Office.

The 29-year-old, who had aspirations to represent Great Britain at the Olympics in 2012 and 2016, came to the U.K. 14 years ago from Nigeria, having been told his Lebanese father was here. Fawaz's mother, an immigrant to Nigeria originally from Benin, was murdered when he was 8 years old.

For six years in Nigeria, Fawaz was raised by relatives. Yet when he came to London at 14 expecting to meet his father, he was treated "like a slave" by the family. He escaped two months later into the arms of social services, from which he was adopted into foster homes.

In his late teens and early twenties, Fawaz was no angel, getting into trouble with the law over minor offenses, but boxing turned his life around. Even so, twice he applied for British citizenship and the right to work here and twice he was denied.

After winning the Amateur Boxing Association light middleweight title in 2012 – the same belt that was won by Joe Calzaghe, Paul Smith and Anthony Fowler – and boxing for England, he was even offered a three-year professional contract by promoter Frank Warren worth £240,000 (about $320,000), but was unable to sign without a work permit.

Fawaz slept on trains and later at Stonebridge Amateur Boxing Club in London, where he cleans the gym and trains. Boxing was his salvation, and now he faces deportation.

"They've ruined my life," Fawaz said of the U.K. Home Office. "I have nowhere to turn to. I haven't worked since I was 18 years old and they want me to survive in this country. When I was fighting for England, I was proud and represented the team, felt like I belonged to something. For them (the Home Office) to turn their back on me after literally bleeding for them in the ring, I feel abandoned all over again."

Fawaz has appealed for bail and will seek a judicial review of his case. I hope he gets justice – which would be to stay.

A VIRTUOSO PERFORMANCE TO END 2017

The last word of 2017 in boxing terms must go to Billy Joe Saunders. He produced a master-class boxing performance in the third defense of his WBO middleweight title in Laval, Canada, nearly shutting out dangerous former titleholder David Lemieux to come of age as a champion. The ease of the victory and the style in which he did it proved beyond any doubt that the undefeated fighter who moved to 26 consecutive victories belongs in a ring with the division's other two stars – Gennady Golovkin and Canelo Alvarez.

I sincerely hope the 28-year-old Hertfordshire Traveller's stock will have risen enormously across The Pond. It was a virtuoso showing in every way: Saunders toying with the knockout artist, winning every round in the eyes of most non-judges, leaving the challenger bewildered with dazzling footwork and the best counterpunching display of his career. Promoter Frank Warren reckoned it was "reminiscent of the night Joe Calzaghe beat Jeff Lacy in Manchester." In dominance, it certainly was.

2017 was a major year over here. Hoping for another one in 2018. Cheers. RING

Billy Joe Saunders backed up his brash talk by schooling David Lemieux.

MATT HEASLEY/HOGAN PHOTOS/GOLDEN BOY

THE U.K.'s BEST OF 2017

FIGHTER: BILLY JOE SAUNDERS • Inspirational vs. David Lemieux.

FIGHT: ANTHONY JOSHUA VS WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO • For the drama.

KNOCKOUT: DANIEL DUBOIS KO 1 AJ CARTER • Frightening one-two finisher.

TRAINER: DAVE COLDWELL • Masterminded Tony Bellew over David Haye.

EVENT: ANTHONY JOSHUA VS. WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO • 90,000 at Wembley Stadium.

ROUND: JOSHUA VS KLITSCHKO, ROUND 11 • Coming of age for AJ.

UPSET: CALEB TRUAX MD 12 JAMES DEGALE • Bucked 20-1 odds for a title.

COMEBACK: GEORGE GROVES • Won 168-pound title in fourth attempt.

PROSPECT: DANIEL DUBOIS • Potential heavyweight star.

MOST INSPIRATIONAL: KATIE TAYLOR • Can change the face of women's pro boxing.

- Gareth A Davies

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for the London Telegraph.

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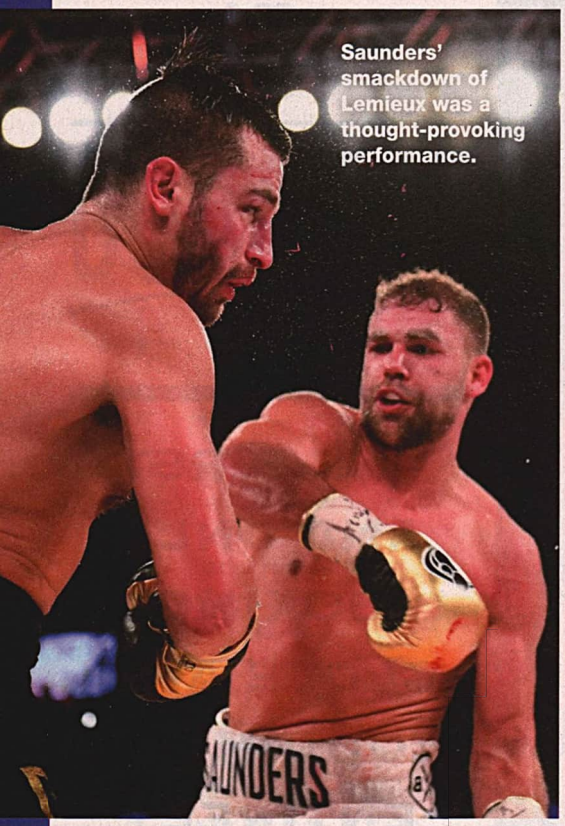
BEST OF DOUGIE'S MAILBAG

By Doug Fischer



Saunders' smackdown of Lemieux was a thought-provoking performance.

EXCERPTS FROM THE RINGTV.COM EDITOR'S POPULAR COLUMN

Since 2001, RingTV.com Editor Doug Fischer has held an ongoing dialogue – which occasionally becomes heated debate – with boxing fans from around the world in "Dougie's Mailbag." The following excerpts are from the December 11 and 18 editions of the Monday mailbag.

MARK, from the U.K., said there were "shades of" Joe Calzaghe's dominating decision over Jeff Lacy in Billy Joe Saunders' "one-sided boxing master class" against David Lemieux. Saunders' fast hands, feet and reflexes reminded Mark a lot of the former super middleweight/light heavyweight champ from Wales, so much so that he asked Fischer if there's "a stylistic comparison to be made with Calzaghe."

Mark felt sorry for Lemieux, admitting that the Montrealer is "a bit one-dimensional," but pointing out that the middleweight puncher is in a division with two pound-for-pound-rated fighters (Gennady Golovkin and Canelo Alvarez) and two top contenders that could, in his opinion, one day crack the mythical rankings (Saunders and Daniel Jacobs). But he added "we shouldn't take anything away from" Saunders' performance.

DOUGIE's reply: We should definitely not take anything away from Saunders' performance (which I was accused of on Twitter the night of the fight – because I said I wasn't terribly entertained by the defending WBO middleweight titleholder's style or by what transpired in the ring), but ironically that's exactly what some of these so-called Saunders fans did by calling Lemieux a "bum" or "overrated."

I agree that the 160-pound division is very strong at the top and Saunders is right in the elite middleweight mix (Golovkin, Canelo and Jacobs). I think Saunders is live against the top three. In fact, I'd favor him over Alvarez and I think a showdown with Jacobs is a toss-up. I'd favor Golovkin to beat him, but I don't think GGG would look great doing so. (It might be near impossible to look good against Billy Joe's style of fighting, but I wouldn't mind seeing technical punchers like Sergiy Derevyanchenko or Jermall Charlo give it a try.)

I'm glad you've got some sympathy for Lemieux. He was woefully inept against Saunders and void of energy, but Saunders – a 2008 Olympian – was dialed in and at his best on December 16. The U.K. standout assumed immediate control of the fight and did not allow Lemieux to gain any confidence or momentum.

As a result of what most viewed as a shutout loss, Lemieux loses his top-five contender status, but that doesn't mean he can't be a factor sometime down the road. I'm not trying to put any blame on Marc Ramsay, because I think the Montreal-based trainer is world-class, but I think maybe Lemieux and his coach have reached that point that some boxer-trainer teams come to when the pupil is no longer listening to the teacher. It happens. Perhaps Lemieux needs a change of location and an experienced coach who specializes in aggressive fighters and rehabilitation projects – yep, I'm wondering in this public forum what Freddie Roach (who happens to have French-Canadian roots) could do with Lemieux.

Regarding Saunders-Lemieux being somewhat like Calzaghe-Lacy, I sort of see what you're getting at. However, there are many differences. I don't think Saunders was a 3-to-1 underdog, as Calzaghe was. And I know he isn't the long-reigning (more than eight years) titleholder that Calzaghe was going into the Lacy bout. Lemieux wasn't a titleholder with four defenses under his belt going into his showdown with a U.K. standout, as Lacy was. And I don't think Saunders put near the beating on Lemmy that Calzaghe put on poor Lacy.

I can see why you think there's a stylistic comparison to be made with Calzaghe and Saunders. They're both smart, mobile southpaw boxers with excellent timing. However, I don't think their boxing styles are similar. Calzaghe was far more dynamic, athletically speaking, and the Welshman dealt in high-volume offense at a frenetic pace. Saunders likes to slow things down, disrupt rhythm and utilize a sporadic offense.

DAVID, from Nashville, Tennessee, said he came away with a newfound respect for Saunders after watching him outclass Lemieux. "I'm hesitant to say how he would fare in the round-robin

MATT HEASLEY/HOGAN PHOTOS/GOLDEN BOY

of Golovkin, Canelo and Daniel Jacobs," he added, "but I want to see (those fights)." David asked Fischer which of the three possible matchups would be the most exciting.

DOUGIE's reply: Golovkin, because of his jab and his ring-cutting ability. He would gradually force Saunders to exchange with him. Canelo's got heavy feet and he doesn't like to hunt mobile opponents down. And though Jacobs can fight coming forward when he wants to, my guess is that he would probably adopt stick-and-move-and-counter tactics against Saunders to avoid the Englishman's traps, which would probably make for a low-impact chess match.

CHRISTIAN FORMBY, from San Juan, Puerto Rico, said Saunders' victory over Lemieux makes the middleweights more interesting. "I think this guy could be a very interesting dark horse in the division," Christian wrote. "I could see him being competitive and maybe beating one of the top three at 160 pounds."

DOUGIE's reply: Time will tell.

I think the most important thing for Saunders is to stay active and to take advantage of the career momentum that he created. I know he called out GGG during his post-fight interview, and what middleweight wouldn't want a crack at Canelo? But the reality is that the two stars of the division are most likely going to fight again on May 5, and that rematch might lead to an immediate rubber match, which means Saunders is going to have to be willing to face some of the other top 160-pounders.

A showdown with Jacobs would be a big fight in England or the NYC/Brooklyn areas, and a title defense against an explosive boxer-puncher like Charlo or a brute-strong, forward-marching technician like Derevyanchenko would make for highly anticipated matchups.

Let's hope Saunders doesn't squander his newly earned respect by sitting out much of 2018 or by defending his WBO title against unworthy challengers.

TAKU, from Japan, was flabbergasted by Vasyl Lomachenko's absolute domination of the highly respected Guillermo Rigondeaux on December 9. "What was wrong with Rigondeaux?" he asked Fischer "Age? Weight? Or was the Ukrainian just at another level?" Taku said Lomachenko's quickness and "mobile, active style posed many problems to Rigo," adding, "perhaps due to a lack of experience against elite opponents with different styles" the Cuban amateur legend was unable to adapt.

DOUGIE's reply: Hey, activity and strength of schedule count in boxing, and Rigondeaux did himself no favors by fighting the level of opposition that he did following the Nonito Donaire victory in 2013, or by fighting as infrequently as he did.

And that's the short answer to your question, 'What was wrong with Rigondeaux?' Lomachenko was what was wrong for Rigo. Loma's style, athleticism and talent is all wrong for counterpunching southpaws, even one of Rigo's experience and high boxing IQ.

Age probably had an impact on Rigo's performance, but I think his inactivity was more of a factor. I don't think weight was much of a factor. Lomachenko was contractually obligated not to put on more than eight pounds after the weigh-in and he didn't physically impose himself on Rigo (the way an overweight Orlando Salido swarmed him back in 2014). Lomachenko boxed the crap out of Rigondeaux. He out-jabbed and outmaneuvered the Cuban while slipping and countering the master counterpuncher.

Do you even have to ask if Loma "is at another level"? It should be obvious, Taku. Trust what your eyes are telling you.

CHRISTOPHER DIAZ

THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF PUERTO RICO MAY SOON HAVE A NEW HERO

Felix Verdejo was anointed the future star of Puerto Rico shortly after the 2012 Olympian turned pro. The lightweight prospect seemed to have it all: good looks, a megawatt smile and flashy skills in the ring.

With Top Rank and HBO behind him, Verdejo was on the cusp of a title shot against Terry Flanagan, but injuries and personal problems combined to keep him on the shelf. He fought only once in 2017, and Verdejo hasn't competed in the United States since a fifth-round stoppage of Juan Jose Martinez in June 2016.

Verdejo is set to re-enter the spotlight with a March 17 outing set for the Theater at Madison Square Garden on ESPN, but he's not the only man from the island ticketed for big things on that card.

Rather, it's his good buddy, Christopher Diaz, who has all the momentum heading into his own appearance on the show.

Diaz opened eyes in December with a three-round shellacking of Bryant Cruz leading into Vasyl Lomachenko's fight with Guillermo Rigondeaux on ESPN. The 23-year-old showed off his impressive power, sharp punching and fight-ending left hook, and the second-largest audience for a boxing broadcast in the U.S. last year saw why it might be Diaz, and not Verdejo, who succeeds the recently retired Miguel Cotto as the standard-bearer for Puerto Rican boxing in 2018 and beyond.

Diaz, who sports short, black hair and a full beard, made a bevy of changes to improve as a fighter, none bigger than moving camp. He used to train in Puerto Rico alongside Verdejo and trainer Ricky Marquez. Now, Raul "Chino" Rivas trains Diaz at his Guts & Glory Boxing Gym in West Berlin, New Jersey, just across the river from Philadelphia, and Top Rank matchmaker Brad Goodman

MIKEY WILLIAMS / TOP RANK BOXING

already sees the difference.

"What he needed, first and foremost, was a change, and that was getting out of Puerto Rico," said Goodman, who has guided Diaz from his pro debut in September 2013 to a 22-0 (14 knockouts) record. "It was a monotonous thing. Now he's with a new group of people. You can't get any better sparring than guys like Tevin Farmer, Mikey Perez and Jason Sosa.

"Whenever he's sparring, he has to work for it. He doesn't have the advantage; it's only going to make him better. He probably had the advantage over the majority of guys he was working with on the island. He was stagnant. He wasn't getting better. He was where he was at."

Now he's at a new position: top prospect on the cusp of a title shot.

Diaz hopes to fight for his first world title in June, and while he yearns to become the next star from Puerto Rico, he feels there's space for both him and Verdejo. He considers Verdejo a brother, and although they no longer train together, they still speak on the phone all the time. They studied at the same school for three years and Diaz doesn't see Verdejo as a competitor to the throne. He sees them as simply working together toward the same goal: to revitalize Puerto Rican boxing.

"I love him so much. He's more than my friend," said Diaz, who is bilingual. "I think Puerto Rico's going to have a lot of fighters like Felix, like me ... We just have to work hard every day, no rest. We have to push ourselves to the limit.

"I think Puerto Rico has like five or six big future superstars. We have to fight for that space. At the end of the day, the work is tough."

It was even tougher growing up without a father.

Diaz loved to fight, even at an early age. When he was 8 years old, he lost his father, who was an amateur boxer with about 20 fights under his belt, to a car accident in Puerto Rico. Diaz was understandably angry. Angry with the world and everything else that comes with great loss.

Why did his father have to leave so soon? They were just getting started, father and son.

It was just as hard on Diaz's mother. She was left to care for Christopher and his two younger brothers, aged 2 and 4. Diaz said they had many "humble moments" as a family in Barranquitas, where he still resides today with his grandmother.

They moved to Orlando, where there's a large Puerto Rican community, though they only stayed for about two years. The storm was still raging inside Diaz, and he continued to let his emotions get the best of him in school. Fights here, fights there – everywhere.

His mom said enough is enough, and decided to let the 12-year-old channel his anger in the boxing gym, where he followed in his father's footsteps.

"I miss him so much, it's hard to lose a father when you're 8," Diaz recalls. "But I'm here to make a story and to take my father's nickname, 'Pitufo,' to glory."

Pitufo, Spanish slang for a short person, is the moniker Diaz carries proudly into the ring today. It's what his friends and family call him, too. Not Christopher or Chris – Pitufo.

At 5-foot-6, Diaz certainly fits the bill. When fans in Puerto Rico greet him at the mall, they always say, "You look so much bigger on TV!"

And he loves it when family friends tell him, "You look like your father and you fight like him, too."

"I know if he was alive, he would be so happy," Diaz says. "I know right now he's so proud of me. Because I'm working hard, he is so proud of me.

"When I come to a fight, I come to fight. I don't come to run, I don't come to box all night; I come to fight. I come to make a great fight for the fans. I say I fight for me, but I fight for the fans. They buy the tickets, they spend time with me."

And Diaz always has time for his admirers. It's the way Felix Trinidad always handled himself, and Diaz wants to emulate the Hall of Famer in that manner, if not in the ring, too.

Diaz swears "that left hook is going to take me to the millions," and if he's confident, it doesn't border on cockiness. He fancies himself a family man, even though his time with his loved ones dwindles more and more as his career burns brighter.

His mother now lives in Orlando, where she works as a nurse. And then there's his 2-year-old daughter. Don't forget Grandma, too. When the Puerto Rico-based WBO throws an event, there she is with her chicken bread and fava beans.

The family is always on Diaz's mind, but the focus is squarely on cementing himself as a junior lightweight champion, an action fighter that delivers on ESPN and, most of all, someone who represents his country with class.

"It feels good when the people love you," Diaz says. "If they love, they feel your pain. The fans are buying tickets, buying pay-per-views; you have to be grateful for them."

Diaz's time is coming. If he can continue to look good as the competition rises – Goodman says he'll be ready for a top-10 opponent after his March appearance – he'll have an entire country behind him.

By then, Pitufo, not Verdejo, could be the anointed one. RING

THE ESSENTIALS
CHRISTOPHER DIAZ

Age: 23

Weight class: Junior lightweight

Height: 5 feet 6 inches

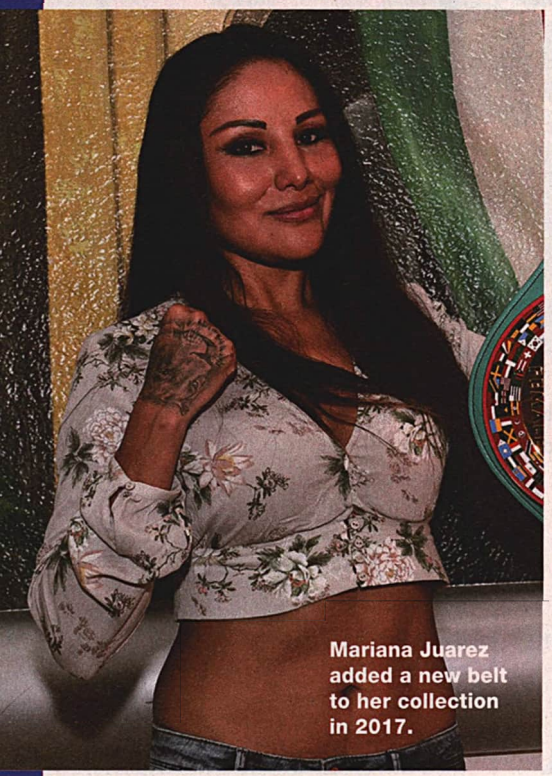
Stance: Orthodox

Hometown: Barranquitas, Puerto Rico

Record: 22-0 (14 knockouts)

BY THOMAS GERBASI

A PIVOTAL YEAR



Mariana Juarez added a new belt to her collection in 2017.

2017 SAW A TREND TOWARD STRONG EVENTS AND GROWING STARPOWER

If women's boxing reaches the heights it deserves in the coming years, 2017 may be seen as the one when it all truly began. With former amateur stars Claressa Shields, Katie Taylor, Nicola Adams and Mikaela Mayer starting to make noise; veteran champions Cecilia Braekhus and Amanda Serrano receiving mainstream coverage; and Showtime and ESPN getting into the game, the future has never looked brighter for the ladies. We celebrate several of them here as the best of the last 12 months.

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

MARIANA JUAREZ

When Mariana Juarez lost for the ninth time as a pro, against Daniela Bermudez in August 2016, many believed the former two-division world champion and Playboy model had seen better days. She was a 36-year-old bantamweight – a division that doesn't treat those past 35 too well – and while she had plenty to be proud of, it seemed time for the young guns to take over. Someone didn't tell "Barby," though, and after closing out 2016 with a close win over Irma Garcia, she turned back the clock in 2017 with a trio of victories over Catherine Phiri, Terumi Nuki and Alesia Graf that saw her win the WBC bantamweight crown and successfully defend it twice. And while an All-Mexico superfight against Jackie Nava didn't happen due to a scheduling issue with the Floyd Mayweather-Conor McGregor bout, it didn't dampen a year in which Juarez proved that maybe, just maybe, life in the boxing ring can begin at 37.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

ESMERALDA MORENO VS. IBETH ZAMORA SILVA IV

Fighting for the fourth time, Esmeralda Moreno and Ibeth Zamora Silva could've known each other so well that their April 22 bout turned into a tactical chess match. It didn't, and what took place over 10 rounds in Metepec, Mexico, was special stuff. Dropped hard by a left hook in the first round, Moreno rose and got in Silva's chest for the rest of the fight, refusing to take a backward step against a champion who had no desire to do so either. There were various rounds that began with the two attempting to box, but once one of them got hit, it was back into the trenches. At the end of 10 rounds, Moreno made it 2-2 between them with a split-decision victory. She would lose her WBC 108-pound title to Jessica Chavez in her next fight, but who wouldn't want to see a fifth meeting between Moreno and Silva, belt or no belt?

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR

ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER KO 1 **BRITTNEY ARTIS**

In a year devoid of jaw-dropping knockouts that epitomize lists like this, I offer Alycia Baumgardner's Aug. 25 finish of Brittney Artis. Technically, it is listed as a TKO, and you won't hear folks wax poetic about referee Ansel Stewart's stoppage at 36 seconds of the first round, but to me, it captured what it takes to be a fighter. Baumgardner, with a huge amateur background, lightning-fast hands and dynamite in her right glove, hit the debuting Artis with that right hand flush on the face. In a delayed reaction, Artis dropped to the canvas, holding what was presumed to be a shattered nose. As she rose, she informed Stewart of this situation and the fight was waved off. I don't know if we'll ever see Artis in the ring again (I'm guessing no), but with one punch, Baumgardner proved that people are either made for this or they're not. And when you make someone quit with one punch, that's a knockout.

UPSET OF THE YEAR

GUADALUPE MARTINEZ GUZMAN UD 10 **ZULINA MUNOZ**

A staple on the Mexican boxing scene, longtime junior bantamweight champion Zulina Munoz had gone unbeaten for nearly a decade – going 32-0-2 during that run – entering her May 13 bout against the unheralded

AP

Guadalupe Martinez Guzman. But Guzman, who stepped into the ring in Cancun with a 14-9 record but wins in seven of her eight previous bouts, was not going to be denied. She pounded out a close but unanimous win over Munoz to end her opponent's 34-fight unbeaten streak and take her WBC title.

ROUND OF THE YEAR

ESMERALDA MORENO VS. IBETH ZAMORA SILVA – ROUND 4

Just like last year's Fight of the Year between Heather Hardy and Shelly Vincent, you could pick a round – any round – between Esmeralda Moreno and Ibeth Zamora Silva and you would be treated to two minutes of fistic fireworks. But in Round 4, the crowd really got into the bout and stayed there thanks to some heated exchanges that threw defense out the window and made you wonder just how the two combatants would keep this pace up for the rest of the 10-rounder. But they did.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

JORDAN MALDONADO

As Amanda Serrano won a world title in a fifth division and got some long overdue exposure on Showtime in 2017, the boxing universe finally began to get on board with the Puerto Rican power-puncher from Brooklyn. And with Amanda and her sister Cindy holding multiple titles and a combined record of 61-6-4, it's time for the man in the corner to get some credit as well. A firm believer in making fighters, not boxers, Jordan Maldonado has been with the Serrano sisters since they first laced on the gloves. And while Cindy is more of a technician in the ring, Amanda has turned into one of the biggest punchers in the sport. Both have developed into elite practitioners of the sweet science.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER

The first female fighter signed by Evander Holyfield's Real Deal Promotions, Alycia Baumgardner has been boxing since the age of 8, and that experience is evident when watching the 23-year-old wreck opponents on fight night. A ferocious puncher with a devastating right hand, Baumgardner had a reported 164-9 amateur record. And she is going to make some noise in the pros, where the 130-pounder is already 4-0 with four first-round knockouts at press time.

EVENT OF THE YEAR

FUJIOKA AND SERRANO MAKE HISTORY

With a seemingly endless supply of sanctioning-body belts to go around, the term "world champion" has been diluted over the years, but while picking up a couple title belts in a single division is a fairly easy task for top-level boxers, doing so over more than one weight class adds to the degree of difficulty. To win world titles in five weight classes, now that's special. In 2017, Naoko Fujioka and Amanda Serrano both opened up an exclusive club in women's boxing as they won their fifth divisional crowns in the junior flyweight and bantamweight classes, respectively.

MOST INSPIRATIONAL

MIA ST. JOHN

After the tragic death of her 24-year-old-son, Julian, in 2014, Mia St. John could have shut herself off from the world and no one would have blamed her for it. But instead, the retired boxer has been showing her fighting spirit ever since then, leading the charge to raise awareness about mental health issues and mental health reform. She has also transformed Julian's art studio in Palm Springs into a center for those suffering from mental illness or dealing with homelessness and addiction, proving that more important than any accomplishments in the ring, St. John is a champion in life. RING

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

YESICA YOLANDA BOPP

Continues to dominate at 108 pounds

After returning to the ring in 2016 after a two-year absence and picking up where she left off in the 108-pound weight class, Argentina's Yesica Yolanda Bopp looks like she may be getting even better in 2017. Fighting for the third time this year, Bopp defended her WBA junior flyweight title against Venezuela's Debora Rengifo and it was clear early on that the challenger was in over her head. In response, Bopp did what you do with overmatched opponents, parlaying three knockdowns into a surrender by Rengifo's corner in Round 7. Bopp is now 9-0 with three knockouts since her lone loss to Jessica Chavez in 2013.

POUND FOR POUND

1. **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
   Norway • 32-0 (9 KOs)
   Welterweight
2. **DELFINE PERSOON**
   Belgium • 39-1 (16 KOs)
   Lightweight
3. **YESICA YOLANDA BOPP**
   Argentina • 33-1 (14 KOs)
   Junior flyweight
4. **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
   Mexico • 30-4-3 (4 KOs)
   Flyweight
5. **AMANDA SERRANO**
   U.S. • 34-1-1 (26 KOs)
   Featherweight
6. **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
   Canada • 37-10-2 (19 KOs)
   Featherweight
7. **ERICA ANABELLA FARIAS**
   Argentina • 24-2 (10 KOs)
   Junior welterweight
8. **LAYLA MCCARTER**
   U.S. • 40-13-5 (10 KOs)
   Lightweight
9. **IBETH ZAMORA SILVA**
   Mexico • 28-6 (12 KOs)
   Junior flyweight
10. **ESMERALDA MORENO**
    Mexico • 35-10-1 (11 KOs)
    Junior flyweight

(Through fights of Dec. 24, 2017)

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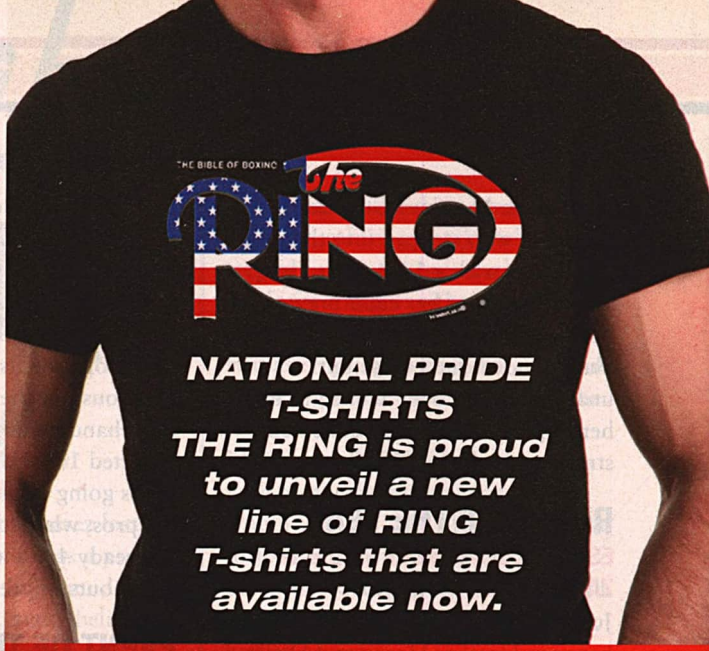

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FEBRUARY

SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI VS. JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA

Date: February 24
Location: Los Angeles
Division: Junior bantamweight (for Sor Rungvisai's WBC title)
RING Ratings: Sor Rungvisai No. 2, No. 10 P4P; Estrada No. 3
TV: HBO
Also fighting: Carlos Cuadras (No. 4) vs. McWilliams Arroyo, junior bantamweights; Brian Viloria (No. 10) vs. Artem Dalakian (No. 9), flyweights (for vacant WBA title).
Significance: This fight is in many ways a referendum on pound-for-pound status. Sor Rungvisai (44-4-1, 40 KOs) made it into the Top 10 as a result of upsetting and then obliterating Roman Gonzalez in back-to-back fights, but some people see those wins as being more about Gonzalez's decline than Sor Rungvisai's attributes, which include copious power and stamina. Meanwhile, many pundits feel Estrada (36-2, 25 KOs) has long been overlooked, and that the former unified flyweight titleholder should've been on the P4P list already. This fight will settle the argument.

FEBRUARY 10 – Sergey Lipinets (No. 7) vs. Mikey Garcia (No. 1, No. 6 P4P), junior welterweights (for Lipinets' IBF title), San Antonio, Texas (Showtime); Also, Rances Barthelemy (No. 9) vs. Kiryl Relikh, junior welterweights; Richard Commey vs. Alejandro Luna, lightweights.

FEBRUARY 10 – Zolani Tete (No. 1) vs. Omar Narvaez (No. 10), bantamweights (for Tete's WBO title), London (BT Sport).

FEBRUARY 10 – Miguel Berchelt (No. 2) vs. Cristian Mijares, junior lightweights (for Berchelt's WBC title), Cancun, Mexico.

FEBRUARY 17 – Danny Garcia (No. 5) vs. Brandon Rios, welterweights, Las Vegas (Showtime); Also, David Benavidez (No. 9) vs. Ronald Gavril, super middleweights (for Benavidez's WBC title).

FEBRUARY 17 – George Groves (No. 2) vs. Chris Eubank Jr. (No. 4), super middleweights (for Groves' WBA title, WBSS semifinal), Manchester, England.

Deontay Wilder could be looking at a superfight if he gets past "King Kong."

MARCH

DEONTAY WILDER VS. LUIS ORTIZ

Date: March 3
Location: Brooklyn, New York
Division: Heavyweights (for Wilder's WBC title)
RING Ratings: Wilder No. 2, Ortiz No. 5
TV: Showtime
Also fighting: Andre Dirrell (No. 7) vs. Jose Uzcategui, super middleweights
Significance: Any fight involving Wilder (39-0, 38 KOs) against anyone other than Anthony Joshua is considered pointless by many, but we'll have to wait a little longer for that blockbuster. Ortiz (28-0, 24 KOs) will attempt to bust Wilder's block in the meantime. "King Kong" has resolved his drug-test issues and will be looking to re-assert himself as a meaningful heavyweight while Wilder, as always, will be trying to convince the nonbelievers that he's more than just a devastating right hand.

MARCH 3 – Sergey Kovalev (No. 1, No. 4 P4P) vs. Igor Mikhalkin, light heavyweights (for Kovalev's WBO title), New York (HBO); Also, Dmitry Bivol (No. 6) vs. Sullivan Barrera (No. 7), light heavyweights.

MARCH 3 – Kell Brook vs. Sergey Rabchenko, junior middleweights, Sheffield, England (Sky).

MARCH 10 – Oscar Valdez (No. 6) vs. Scott Quigg (No. 8), featherweights (for Valdez's WBO title), Carson, Calif. (ESPN). Also, Jessie Magdaleno (No. 2) vs. TBA, junior featherweights (for Magdaleno's WBO title).

MARCH 17 – Jose Ramirez (No. 10) vs. Amir Imam, junior welterweights (for vacant WBC title), New York (ESPN).

APRIL

APRIL 7 – Carl Frampton (No. 3) vs. Nonito Donaire, featherweights, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

MAY

MAY 5 – Tony Bellew vs. David Haye II, heavyweights, London (Sky Box Office).

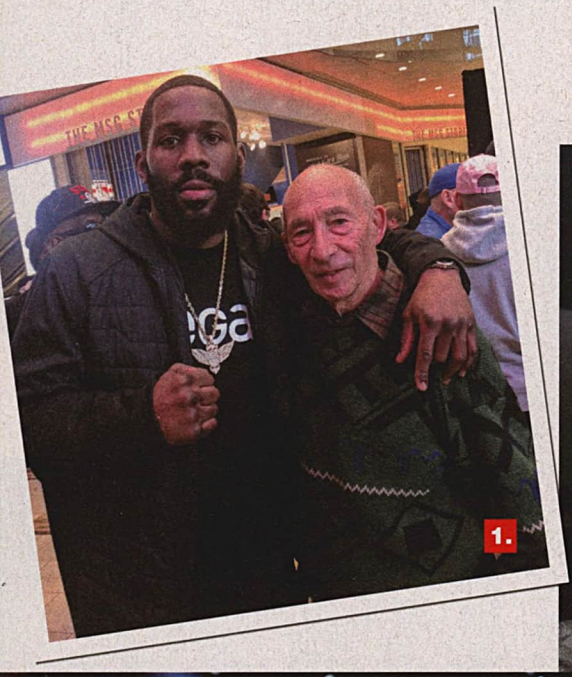
MAY 19 – Lee Selby (No. 4) vs. Josh Warrington (No. 10), featherweights (for Selby's IBF title), Leeds, England.

LEGENDARY FINISH, LEGENDARY FIGHTER: A swollen, bloody Jake LaMotta looks down at the fallen, equally battered Laurent Dauthuille in the final seconds of their dramatic middleweight title bout on September 13, 1950, in Detroit. Dauthuille, a RING-rated contender from France, had vowed to seize the 160-pound championship from The Bronx Bull in honor of his country's hero, Marcel Cerdan, who lost the title to LaMotta in June 1949 and then his life a few months later when the plane transporting him to the rematch crashed into a mountain. The proud challenger dominated most of the bout but began to wilt by the 12th round. LaMotta, who was behind on points going into the 15th round, summoned a brutal salvo of blows to put Dauthuille down for the count – 13 seconds before the final bell. LaMotta's dramatic comeback and furious finish earned the bout THE RING's Fight of the Year award.

#ATTHEFIGHTS

By **Lamar Clark**

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS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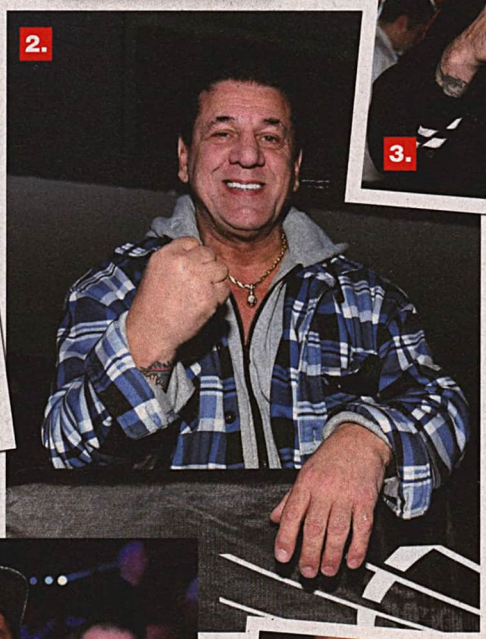
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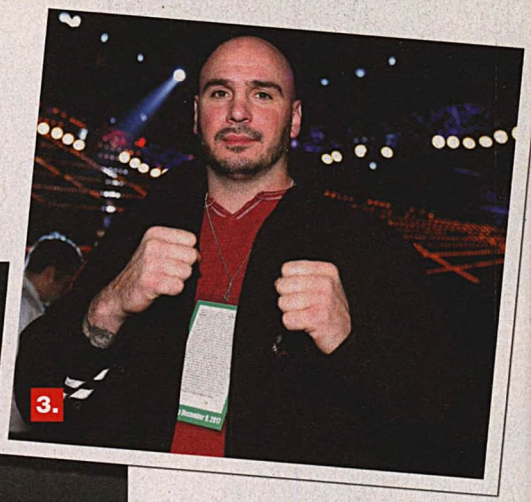
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Lomachenko vs Rigondeaux, Madison Square Garden, NYC: 1. Bryant Jennings and Frank Lanza (right); 2. actor Chuck Zito; 3. former middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik; 4. undisputed light welterweight champion Terence Crawford and trainer Brian McIntyre (right); Saunders vs Lemieux, Place Bell, Laval, Quebec: 5. heavyweight champion Tyson Fury.

4.

5.

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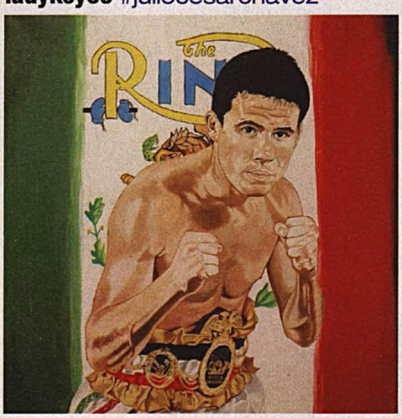

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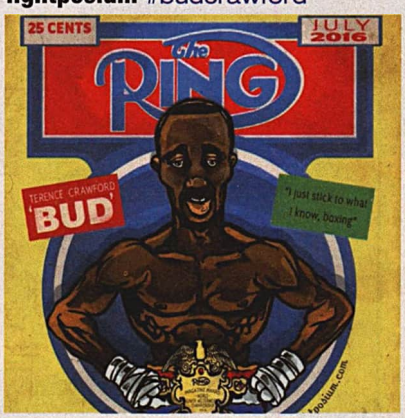

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